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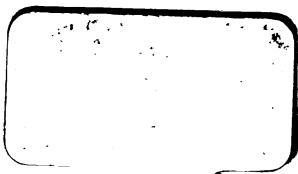
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MAURICE DURANT.



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BY

CHARLES GARVICE,

AUTHOR OF "ONLY COUNTRY LOVE," "EVE," &c.

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CHAPTER I.

"This is my kingdom ; these my subjects.
My sceptre is their love,
My throne their hearts."

LADY MILDRED and the young ladies found Chudleigh Chichester in one of the narrow avenues of flowers in the impromptu place of exhibition, the school-room.

The place was crowded with the villagers and farm labourers, Hodge staring with grinning admiration at the rows of dazzling nature-jewels, and the small tradesmen and servants flocking to and fro amidst a storm of delighted expressions.

At the farther end of the room stood Sir Fielding, Mrs. Gregson, and Mr. Gregson, chat-

ting affably, and examining a splendid specimen of amber rose.

Chudleigh, surrounded by an affectionately respectful group of his adoring tenants, was admiring a fine specimen of an English juvenile as the ladies approached him, and looked up with a start, and a pleased smile as he recognised the stately figure of Carlotta.

"What did you mean, Chud, by ordering us here an hour too soon?" said Lady Mildred, smiling right and left at the reverential group which made way for her.

Chudleigh flushed slightly and stooped to pick up a flower tablet.

"I thought you would like to look over the flowers quietly—that is, before the doors were open," and he stole a glance at the grand face of Carlotta.

But she was looking at a camellia and did not appear to have heard either the question or the answer.

"Oh, was that it?" said Lady Mildred. "Of

course. How stupid of me. We might have guessed the reason, my dear," turning to Carlotta. "Never mind, Chudleigh; you shall take us all through now," and she placed her exquisitely gloved hand upon his arm. "I think," she said, "I see Sir Fielding and Mrs. Gregson, my dear. I'll go and speak to them. Don't trouble to come, Chud; I can make my way. See to the girls," and her ladyship, with a pleasant smile, made her way to the group at the end of the room, where she could be heard talking with rapid good nature, delighting the Gregsons by her amiability and pleasing Sir Fielding, for he then was left to walk out into the open air away from the crowd and the show.

"Who told you that you were an hour too soon, Miss Lawley?" said Chudleigh, having by some means or other—probably not unaided by Maud—managed to separate Carlotta from the throng and inveigle her, under the pretence of inspecting a fine tulip, into an almost deserted corner.

"Maud, I think," said Carlotta, lifting her eyes to his, but dropping them beneath his gaze, which would be admiring, try hard though he did to make their expression simply respectfully calm. "No, not Maud. One of the Miss Gregsons. It was a mistaken kindness."

"How gracious of you to say so," he said, quickly.

She raised her brows.

"We should have had more time and room in which to see the flowers."

"Ah, yes," he said, disappointedly ; "that was what I meant."

"All this must have given you a great deal of trouble," said Carlotta, as they walked on.

"Not much," said Chudleigh. "It was quickly arranged, and Maud has been a valuable help. I would not mind undergoing twice the trouble to give these simple souls one quarter the pleasure they are evidently taking in the affair."

Carlotta glanced at him—he was looking another way—with a sudden light in her eyes,

that made them look more beautiful because more tender and eloquent, but she said, coldly enough :

" They look pleased, so you have your reward. That is a fine specimen. Who exhibits it ? "

" The old bedridden woman at the end of the church lane. She has tended it like a baby—it is a baby to her, I expect. Lady Mildred would do wise to give her a prize. I have put her name on the list."

" And this," said Carlotta, pointing to a rhododendron.

" That is from the workhouse at Ansleigh. An old pauper brought it over this morning, and asked if it might be put among the others. It was placed while he waited. He was delighted."

" It is a very fine one, is it not ? " said Carlotta.

" Capital," said Chudleigh.

" Are you going to give it a prize ? "

" No, we cannot. There are better ones in

the room, and we are playing fairly, you know."

"Would you let me give a prize for those two, then?" said Carlotta, with a sudden change from her old manner to a hesitating, almost humble one.

"Let you!" said Chudleigh, eagerly. "Of course, Miss Lawley, and very grateful that you should take such interest in us."

"Thank you," said Carlotta. "I did not know whether I might; you are so inflexible in your laws and rules, Mr. Chichester, when they are made for the good and management of your little kingdom, that I trembled," and she smiled, "lest I was proposing something treasonable."

At her tone, which was almost sarcastic in her endeavour to regain the composure she had lost for the moment, Chudleigh's look of happiness died away, and with something like anger he said :

"You have full permission from the throne

to do anything you choose, even to the disposing of the kingdom or planning a new set of laws, though I fear so small a government would be too trivial and ridiculous for you who have seen so much, governed so many."

She saw the smarting of his wound in his grave voice and brave smile, and at once healed it.

"Will the king forgive me?" she said, in her low, sweet voice, which had the charming power of a Circe's; "he misunderstands!"

Chudleigh turned his face to her with a flash of the eye and a quick pressure of the hand upon her own that made her tremble.

"Let us go to Lady Mildred," she said, quietly, before he could speak, and, recovering himself at her once more cold tone, he bowed in silence and led her on.

Lady Mildred, surrounded by the "committee," as Chudleigh had termed the Gregsons and Sir Fielding, was going over the various names of the exhibitors to whom Sir Fielding

and Mr. Gregson had decided prizes were meritoriously due.

"Oh, do come here, Chud," said she; "I'm feeling so confused, and your father cannot, or will not, help me at all. Tell me how you pronounce that word—it's Latin, and I can't get hold of it. Sir Fielding has told me three times, but laughed so that I could not hear him."

Chudleigh stooped down to spell over the Latin noun, and Carlotta glided from his side to Sir Fielding, who welcomed her with a genial smile, and commenced scolding her for not coming over to the Hall.

"I have missed you so much," he said, with his pleasant, thorough-bred voice. "It is cruel of you to keep away from us after leading us to hope that we should be good friends. You promised to tell me about the Emperor's translation of 'Sophocles,' and Didiaeno's copy of 'Æschylus.' If you have forgotten your debts I have not. Why do you not come to

us as often as you said you would, Miss Lawley?"

Carlotta smiled as she only smiled at him.

"Will you believe me, Sir Fielding, when I tell you I have been busy? Lady Mildred and I have been working in the conservatory and the garden, at the aviary and the needle-frame most arduously."

"Then I shall order a holiday," said Sir Fielding, with a smile. "Lady Mildred and you must come over to the Hall straight, to-day—straight from here—nay, I will take no refusal. I will beg Mr. and Mrs. and the Misses Gregson to join us. Ah! here's Chudleigh—he shall make you prisoners."

"I am waiting your majesty's instructions concerning your two subjects who have been fortunate enough to meet your approval," said Chudleigh, in a low voice, all eager and business-like, yet calm and unflurried, although the noise was getting louder and louder as the time for the distribution of the prizes approached.

Carlotta looked down thoughtfully.

"I really don't know how much to give them," she said. "Will ten pounds each be enough?"

"Too much," said Chudleigh, decisively. "Would you have all the rest jealous?"

"Five, then?" said Carlotta.

"Five will do," said Chudleigh, and away he went to the table again.

Then Maud came up, followed by the faithful Tom, who walked behind, watching the crowd with bewildered air, and wondering within his mind how the people could possibly pay so much attention to the poor patches of blossom and leaf when the most glorious flower in the whole world was walking in their midst.

Presently Lady Mildred came forward with the list in her hand, and proceeded to distribute the prizes.

It was amusing to watch the way in which the various successful candidates received their prizes.

The round, baby-faced Hodge, who had to be pushed forward by his excited friends, came up, scratching his head, and blushing like his familiar carrot, taking the money when he got it as if he did not know what to do with it, looking as near a sudden death from over-shyness as it was possible for him to be.

One or two stalwart gardeners, more *au fait* at this sort of thing, stepped up with a business-like air and took their golden sovereigns as their right; while two old women, who had reared some fuchsias in a cottage of two rooms to a state of perfection, came up slowly, leaning upon their sticks, and crowed out, "Heaven bless ye, my laydee!" in acknowledgment.

After this rather elaborate business was disposed of, the meeting caught an attack of cheering, and a sturdy young farmer, whose head o'ertopped by some inches the remainder of the crowd, took the lead in a series of hurrahs from Lady Mildred down to Mr. Tom Gregson, whose surprise at such a display of enthusiasm

for him was only outstripped by his embarrassment.

Then Chudleigh marshalled his people out, and returned to Sir Fielding, who immediately commissioned him with the invitations.

All were accepted, and Lady Mildred and Carlotta drove off to the Hall, while the Gregsons galloped home to change their habits and morning suits for the conventional dinner costume.

The dinner was a very pleasant—almost a merry—one, for the Gregson element introduced a great deal of laughter, which Lady Mildred's genial yet thoroughbred manner nicely toned down.

Mr. Gregson senior engaged Sir Fielding in a political argument, but of so mild a nature that it did not create more attention than was its due, notwithstanding he once or twice emphasized an assertion, to which Sir Fielding had gently shook his head, by banging the delicate wine-glass on the table.

Maud joined in the conversation going on around, and bent her beautiful smile and attentive ear to her next neighbour—of course, Mr. Tom—with her usual gentleness, but a keen observer would have discovered that many of the bashful young man's speeches were unheard by her, and that the gentle smile served but to hide a wistful, almost sad expression, that broke the reverie every now and then.

At the end of the table Carlotta Lawley was seated next Chudleigh, who ministered to her every want, and seemed to supply every wish before it was expressed.

Chudleigh, being hungry, talked little until the joint had vanished, and then found that Miss Bella Gregson, on the opposite side of the table, demanded a great deal of his attention.

"Mr. Chichester," said that young lady, "do you know your sister says that she likes Mr. Chatplaine's sermons——"

"Some of them, I said," put in Maud, quietly.

"Well, some of them. Now, Mr. Chichester,

I want your opinion of them. I can't read them, really. Oh, they are dreadful, such Low-Church ones, and so very heretical," and Miss Bella shook her head gravely. "I'm sure you don't approve of them, Mr. Chichester."

"I don't, indeed," said Chudleigh, rather absently, being engaged in stealing from an *épergne* for Carlotta.

"I am so glad!" said Miss Bella.

"Eh, what's that?" said Sir Fielding, attracted by the joyous exclamation, and, fortunately for Chudleigh, the discussion on the Rev. Tobias Chatplaine's sermons was transferred from son to father.

"I have a new picture to show you in the gallery," said Chudleigh to Carlotta as the ladies rose. "Would you like to look at it? It is by an unknown artist—by unknown I mean undiscovered."

Carlotta, whose love for art was always at passion heat, answered at once:—

"A new picture? I should be delighted!"

"Very well, I shall search for you beside the piano in the drawing-room, and bear you off," and her eyes lit up as he held the door for her.

Of course Mr. Gregson liked old port, and of course the Hall had old port, though not so old or so fine as the Folly, as Sir Fielding graciously admitted, and the four gentlemen were soon leaning back in an easy attitude, produced by a nicely executed dinner and the passing bottle.

The two younger men, having lost their hearts with the ladies, were content to sit and listen, putting in or exchanging a word now and then with their revered parents, who, of course, were on politics.

"Progress, sir," Mr. Gregson was saying, waving his hand with an upward motion. "Progress, Sir Fielding, is the great law of nature. Everything must grow, crop, man, woman, supply, demand——"

"Taxes—that is, under a Liberal Government," murmured Sir Fielding, with a twinkle of the eyes.

"Education," continued Mr. Gregson, taking no notice of the parenthesis, "commerce and the fine arts—all are growing, sir——"

"And a blowing," muttered Tom, though to himself, and thinking perhaps of the flower show.

"All are tending to one great end — the emancipation of the working man."

"From what do you want the working man emancipated?" asked Sir Fielding.

"From slavery, sir," thundered Mr. Gregson, banging the table. "From the crushing feet of the tyrant Capital, from the giant Caste, from, from——"

"A position in which they are a great deal better off than the working man of any other nation under the sun, and thousands of really educated men," said Sir Fielding, sipping his port wine.

"Better off!" exclaimed Mr. Gregson. "Look at them. See their wives, their children clothed in rags, packed in dens to which our sheep-folds

are palaces, and then tell me that the working man of this mighty empire is a free and independent being."

Sir Fielding pushed the bottle and blew his nose—perhaps to hide the smile which the Manchester man's stump declamation certainly deserved.

"Oh, I haven't given so much time or consideration to the subject as yourself, Mr. Gregson," he said, "and therefore do not feel myself a match for you; still I must declare I see nothing in the condition of the English working man to merit commiseration; on the contrary, I think the country has much to congratulate itself upon when it sees a body strong enough to assert itself so loudly as does the typical political workman."

"You are a Tory, sir," said Mr. Gregson, with gracious pity, "and see things in a different light."

"And you are a Liberal," retorted Sir Fielding, smilingly, "and in some cases take

care to see things with no light to them at all."

Neither Chudleigh nor Tom Gregson could refrain from laughing at this epigrammatical retort, and in the midst of their good humour Sir Fielding stopped the discussion by rising to join the ladies.

This was not the first time politics had served as battle-ground for the Folly and the Hall, but at present the arena was covered with sawdust, and the fight a mimic one; later on it was destined to be a stern conflict, in which wealth and caste, pride and party, principle and interest, were to wage war to the knife.





CHAPTER II.

"Poor and content is rich, and rich enough."

SHAKESPEARE.

"'Tis pride, rank pride, and haughtiness of soul ;
I think the Romans call it stoicism."

JOSEPH ADDISON'S "CATO."

CHUDLEIGH found the ladies disposed about the drawing-room in this wise—Lady Mildred and Mrs. Gregson comfortably ensconced in easy-chairs, chatting over domestic affairs and comparing notes on dress and matrimonial intrigue, Maud and the girls clustered at the piano, where Carlotta was playing.

Chudleigh went and leaned against the piano, literally overshadowing the performer, who wound up with a dash, and looking up said, with mock solemnity :

"Mr. Chichester, I have been playing in the dark for some minutes in consequence of your being opaque instead of transparent, as you should be if you intend standing in front of the candles."

Chudleigh laughed.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "My excuse is——"

"Don't listen to his excuse, Carlotta dear," said Maud, shaking his arm. "And don't forgive him."

"I don't think I will," said Carlotta, laughing and rising from the stool. "Now, Miss Gregson, I claim the fulfilment of your promise."

"Oh, I don't know what to play," simpered Miss Lavinia, with an affectation of nervousness, though she was singularly self-possessed and a very tolerable player. "I haven't any music either."

"Let me see if I cannot find you a piece," said Chudleigh, cheerfully preparing to go

through the usual farce, and stooping to turn over the canterbury.

After a quarter of an hour's excuses, and backing, and jibbing—as her brother called it—Miss Lavinia consented to seat herself and commenced to play, Chudleigh blocking the light for one minute only and crossing over to the corner where Carlotta sat turning the leaves of Tennyson's last poem.

"Have you forgotten the picture?" he asked, bending over her.

"No," she said, looking up. "We will wait till Miss Gregson has finished, and then go and see it."

"Why wait?" he asked. "You have heard 'The Maiden's Prayer' twenty times at least. Come now."

She took his offered arm, and, saying in a low voice to his father that he was going to show Miss Lawley the new picture, he led her into the hall.

"I will come with you," said Sir Fielding,

with unconscious good nature ; but, fortunately for Chudleigh's almost over-tried temper, Mr. Tom Gregson button-holed the baronet about a horse he was anxious Sir Fielding should buy for Maud.

"Do you remember when we were in here last?" said Chudleigh, dropping his voice almost to a whisper, as they trod the polished oak of the gallery.

"Yes," replied Carlotta, "and the trouble you were kind enough to take in explaining the pictures to me."

"I didn't wish to recall that," said Chudleigh. "Trouble! I should be almost angry with you for using the word, only I am aware you know it is the wrong one. Say, rather, 'delight,' Miss Lawley——"

"Where is the picture?" interrupted Carlotta, with hurried eagerness, unconsciously walking faster in her anxiety to stop him.

"Ah, yes, the picture ; it is here," he said, flushing, and he pointed to a small piece of

forest, with a man and a dog lying beneath a clump of trees.

"This is it."

Carlotta bent down and looked at the picture for some minutes in silence, at first with an interest caused by its beauty, then, suddenly, with an exclamation of surprise and a keener gaze. Looking up, she said :

"Do you know the artist?"

"No," he said. "Nor can we find out. Do you?"

"No," she replied, "but I have seen the picture before, and several others painted by the same hand. They are masterpieces. This hue—that piece of colouring there—could only be painted by one hand—the hand that drew the 'Cleopatra' which filled Florence with admiration, and the piece of sea-scape—that which the prince purchased—you know the picture I mean?"

"Yes," said Chudleigh, with surprise; then, with a look of admiration, "And you are sure this is by the same man?"

"I think I am certain," replied Carlotta.

Chudleigh muttered something, and the beautiful woman looked up.

"What did you say?"

"You will be angry, perhaps, if I tell you," said Chudleigh.

She shook her head.

"I was marvelling at your knowledge," he said. "Every day you astonish me by unconsciously showing how immeasurably more clever you are than the rest of womankind," and he sighed.

Carlotta smiled.

"That is very gross flattery," she said. "You should learn to wrap your compliments in silver tissue, or you will not even get the vainest to accept them as true metal."

"It was no compliment," he said, with simple gravity, fixing his great, earnest eyes on her face.

"Then you should not have said it," she retorted.

"You promised you would not be angry!" he said.

"Nor am I," she replied, raising her eyes to his with another flash of light that sent the blood, already exceedingly excited, racing through his veins.

"I should not have said it!" he murmured. "Must I always remain dumb in your presence? I am, almost, for I fear to say a word lest it should anger you—I know not why, for I am seldom so cautious. Miss Lawley, I have fancied that you are unusually cold to me—not unkind—that you cannot be, but reserved and—— Oh, Carlotta, I must speak out. Why do you treat me as if I had done you some wrong, as if I were one to be kept at a distance? You shun me while you are gracious to others who cannot reverence you more than I do! Tell me how I, who love the very ground on which you tread, have merited your dislike—I had almost said disdain! Tell me why. Ah, Carlotta, don't look so coldly at

me. If you knew how I love you, how I have loved you since the night I came and found you seated like an angel at my father's side, if you knew—— how should you know?—of the passion that eats my very life up and fills me night and day with but one thought—one longing for you!”

Flashing like a burst of sunlight, he caught her arm and drew her towards him.

She looked at him for an instant with the old cold look, then turned white, her lips quivering and her eyes filling with tears.

His heart leaped as his eyes read these signs of her emotion, and he uttered a low cry of joy that died on his lips, as with a great effort she drew herself from his grasp, and, turning her head aside, said, sadly :

“Not a word more. It cannot be!”

“Cannot be?” he cried, in a low, thrilling voice. “It is! How can I help loving you? I must!—‘It cannot be!’ Oh, Carlotta, tell me why.”

Though the agony that trembled in his voice pierced her heart, she remained motionless and silent.

He drew himself up for a moment, then looked on the ground; suddenly he started, and taking her hand, said :

"Carlotta, for God's sake tell me at once if I am wrong. You know—you have heard of our misfortune. You know that the Hall is ruined, that I am a beggar! Oh, God, I had forgotten it!" and he hid his face in his hands.

She turned towards him with a sudden gesture, but recovered herself and stood silent.

The great Hall clock chimed the hour.

He waited until its last stroke had died away, then with averted face held out his arm. She took it, and the quiver that ran through him at her touch, scattered her almost supernatural calm to the winds.

Catching at his arm, she cried, almost hoarsely :

“Listen, Chudleigh! Before you judge me hear my story and my confession. I love you! —Stop, not a word! Do not touch me. I owe it you, for I shall nearly break your heart—my own is breaking. I have sworn to marry a rich man—you are ruined now. Don’t shrink; you would pity, not scorn me, if you knew the story of the years that led me to register that vow. Chudleigh, from a child I have lived, eaten, slept with poverty—poverty in its worst form, poverty clad in dishonour, tricked out in deceit. He who gave me life, my father, was a poor man, a man who lived one continual falsehood, a schemer for daily bread, daily life; a man who lived one long life of plotting misery, driven here and there by the grim poverty that like a fiend hounded him from Court to Court, from city to city, plotting, planning, scheming—oh, Chudleigh!—cheating for the dross that makes the world; and I was with him, always an accomplice in his schemes, a tool in his knavish hand. My life

has been a torture. I have heard the sneer, the scoff, and the bitter sarcasm levelled at me in my very face. I have known what it is to be scorned as an adventurer and a thief! Chudleigh, from childhood up till now I have walked the road which only genteel poverty knows, barefooted and in misery, and I have sworn to leave the path for ever so soon as one comes forward to take me by the hand. A poor man's wife! I! who know all that the word 'poor' means when it is joined to 'gentleman,' no, never! I have sworn it, and I will not break my vow."

Like a queen she drew herself up to her full height, and stood with outstretched hands and blazing eyes from which the tear-drops still glistened.

Chudleigh stood looking at her, scarcely hearing each word distinctly, yet grasping her meaning with a clearness that tortured his heart almost beyond bearing; then, when she had finished, he raised his eyes with a dumb,

piteous agony, and struggling with his voice, that sounded harsh and hollow as a dying man's, said :

“ You will not break your vow, but you will break my heart ! ”





CHAPTER III.

"Either from lust of gold or like a girl,
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes."

TENNYSON'S "MORT D'ARTHUR."

"Like some poor girl whose heart is set
On one whose rank exceeds her own."

IN MEMORIAM.

THE morning after the flower-show and the dinner at the Hall, Chudleigh came down to the breakfast-table looking rather pale and out of sorts, with two heavy black marks under his eyes.

"You look unwell, Chud, dear," said Maud, as he bent to kiss her forehead. "Have you a headache?"

"Yes," said Chudleigh, carelessly, "been awake all night."

"You must have some tea," said Maud, ringing for it, "and go and lie down afterwards."

"I'll have the tea, but not the sofa, Maudie," he said. "I have to ride over to Woodfells about the timber on the four-acre, and, by the way, I promised the steward I would check that file of accounts this morning," and he stifled a weary sigh.

"Poor Chud!" said Maud, leaning over his shoulder and pressing her white hand against his brow. "You work as hard as a banker's clerk. Cannot you stay at home and rest for one day?"

Chudleigh shook his head.

"No, Maudie, my child; the estate is a large one, you know, and requires looking after. How do you think the flower-show went off yesterday?"

"Oh, delightful, Chud," she replied; "the people seemed pleased beyond expression. I believe any one of them would do anything for you. I always thought they harboured a

kind feeling for me, but I think they really idolise you. Carlotta said last night that she heard your name on their lips as she passed every group."

Chudleigh raised his cup as she pronounced Carlotta's name and winced.

"Carlotta does not come to see us so often as she promised. I told her we had offended her last night, but she only laughed, and said that she had been busy."

"Was that all she said?" asked Chudleigh, quietly scraping some butter along the toast, and making a most unnecessary noise with the knife.

"Yes; she spoke very little after she came back to the drawing room. Where did you go, Chudleigh—into the picture gallery?"

Chudleigh nodded.

"Carlotta's fond of pictures," mused Maud, innocently. "I think she herself draws and paints. I should not be surprised to find that she did everything that was clever and beautiful."

"Ah!" said Chudleigh, with a feigned indifference, though his eyes grew dim staring into the tea-cup. "I—I'll have a piece more toast, if you'll pass it."

"The papers, sir," said a footman, entering and laying the day's news on the table.

Glad of a shield and screen, Chudleigh caught up the *Times*, and commenced looking it over.

"Let me see, where is papa's *Standard*?" said Maud, turning the pile over. "Ah! here it is. I must air it for him. I wonder what makes him so late in the library."

"Maud," interrupted Chudleigh, with an agitation perfectly inexplicable to his sister, "Lord Crownbrilliants died yesterday morning——"

"Lord Crownbrilliants!" repeated Maud.

"Yes, Mr. Hartfield's father. He, Mr. Hartfield, has the title now."

"She looked at him, and in his despairing face and trembling tones her quick love saw like a flash of light the hidden cause.

Stretching out her hand until it clasped his as it lay on the table, she whispered, tenderly :

“What have you to fear, Chudleigh?”

“Everything,” he said, dropping his head on his breast and turning his face from her. “Everything. I have lost the race, Maudie—lost!”

With a tender-hearted cry she raised her hand to his lips, murmuring :

“Poor Chud, poor Chud!”

* * * * *

Perhaps at the same moment that Chudleigh's eye caught the paragraph in the morning paper Carlotta was reading the same announcement.

She, like Chudleigh, looked white and ill, for she had spent the long night hours in watchfulness and pain.

How terrible the struggle had been between love and policy no one could imagine unless they had seen her pressing her beautiful face against the pillow, to stifle the sobs that shook

her form, and hide the tears that coursed down her face.

"So noble!" she moaned, "so good, so noble! Will it break his heart? He looked as if it would. Will it break mine? It seems breaking now. One minute more and I should have given way. One more look at his poor, working face and he would have been conqueror. And would it not have been better so? No, no; a thousand times no. Better wealth and comfort with an imbecile (how bitter the word sounded!) than love-killing poverty with Chudleigh Chichester. Chudleigh! Chudleigh! his very name is grand, honest and noble—noble like his heart. Oh, Carlotta, will all the wealth of the Indies ever make you forget his nobility?"

Then—for even grief must have an end—her sobs gave way to a light, uneasy sleep, in which she saw Chudleigh's face, wan and drawn with a tearless agony, bleeding before her closed yet seeing eyes.

In three weeks' time Lord Crownbrilliants came down to Grassmere.

Dressed in black, with mourning jewellery set with diamonds, and followed by a retinue of servants, he took up his quarters at the Inn, the best rooms of which had been specially prepared for him.

The Gregsons had sent him a pressing invitation to the Folly, but his lordship courteously refused, saying that he should take up his quarters at the Inn, as he should be compelled to run up and down to town, and grant interviews to a host of business men who would be a nuisance at the Folly.

So that the Gregsons had to be consoled with the reflection that the Inn was only ten minutes' walk from their garden, and his lordship's promise to dine and stay with them as often as he possibly could.

For the first two days Lord Crownbrilliants remained in his rooms, but on the third he rode

into the village across the heath, and swooped down upon the Folly.

Of course he was very tenderly treated and commiserated, although he looked anything but a mourner, and after the first few minutes laughed with his old soft enjoyment.

Walking round the garden with the two Miss Gregsons, prettily dressed in flowering muslins, and topped with straw hats, he said :

"I'm looking out for a little shooting-box down hereabouts. Do you know of any, Miss Lavinia?"

Miss Lavinia's heart beat fast, and the blood coloured her cheek.

"I—I don't know," she said. "Papa might, or Tom. I don't think there is anything in Grassmere."

"No," said Miss Bella. "There are several places to be sold in Annsleigh, though. I will ask papa."

Whereupon she ran up to Mr. Gregson, who was abroad growling at the gardener.

"What sort of a place do you want, Mr. Hart—my lord," asked Mr. Gregson, touching the title reverentially. "There's a pretty place on the Annsleigh Road, the Retreat—don't know whether you have ever seen it."

"The Wetweat?" said Lord Crownbrilliant. "Let me wecollect! The Wetweat—oh, ah! yes, I wemember. Pwetty little box behind some twees. Good stables, conserwatawies, lawns, and that sort of thing."

"Yes, that's the place, no doubt," said Mr. Gregson. "It used to belong to an old sea captain, who, having plenty of money, made it quite a handsome house. It's not so large as the Folly," added the Folly's owner, glancing up at the monstrosity with an air of pride.

"Don't want it so large," said Lord Crownbrilliant. "I want a cigar box, not a p-packing case—he, he!"

And he laughed, Mr. Gregson feeling compelled to join him, although the laugh was at his expense.

"I'm glad to find you think of becoming a neighbour, my lord," said Gregson. "Quite a brilliant addition to the county."

"Yes, a Cwownbwilliant," laughed his lordship, this time alone, Mr. Gregson not daring more than a smile.

"And now I must go. I'm going to call at the cottage. Lady Mildwed well?" he asked, looking another way, and speaking with that indifference which is always more significant than the tone it is meant to hide.

"Oh, yes," said Miss Bella. "We dined with her at the Hall a little while since."

"And Miss—Miss Lawley?"

"Oh, yes," said Miss Bella again, but with a sudden coldness in her voice. "Oh, yes, Miss Lawley is quite well, I think."

"Then I'll go," said his lordship, with a sudden precipitance. "Good-morning, Mr. Gregson; morning, Tom."

Coming to the gate near Lavinia, he said:

"Nice day, isn't it? What do you think of

the horse? Pretty colour—yes, vewy. Good-morning.”

And his lordship cantered off.

“Bella,” said Miss Lavinia, “I’m afraid——”

And she shook her head.

“So am I,” said Miss Bella, shaking hers also.

At the cottage gate Lord Crownbrilliant’s manner lost a great deal of the calm with which it had carried things at the Folly.

Indeed his heart beat to such an extent as he dismounted that he felt half inclined to leave his card only, and return to the Inn.

But as the servant opened the door Lady Mildred crossed the hall, and the “card trick” fell through.

“I am glad to see you looking so well,” said Lady Mildred as he took her hand.

They went into the drawing-room.

“You have had a sad loss—very sad. I remember Lord Crownbrilliant’s, your father, a perfect Adonis in his youth. I danced three times with him in one evening at Lady Crush-

crash's, I think; very wrong, I know, but he was perfectly irresistible. Dear me, dear me! how the time runs by!"

Lord Crownbrilliants murmured something, and Lady Mildred ran softly on:

"Have you called at the Hall yet? Sir Fielding was speaking of you last night. He remembers Lord Crownbrilliants well, and was quite shocked to hear of his death. You must go and stay at the Hall. Sir Fielding has already sent you an invitation."

"I had it this morning," said his lordship. "Vewy kind of Sir Fielding. I shall be glad to go. The Hall's a pwetty place, I think."

"Oh, very," said Lady Mildred, with the slightest suspicion of pride. "I don't think there is a better old place in England, not even your castle at Lanard."

"I have never seen it," said Lord Crownbrilliants.

"Indeed," said her ladyship. "You must go and see it at once. It is a beautiful place. I

remember staying there three weeks, and thinking it the most delightful place in the world."

"It must be lovely if your ladyship speaks so highly of it," murmured Lord Crownbrilliant.

Then he commenced looking round the room in an aimless sort of manner, and answering Lady Mildred's questions at random, whereupon her ladyship, who was no dullard, rang the bell and told a servant to inform Miss Lawley that Lord Crownbrilliant was in the drawing-room.

In three minutes, which at one moment seemed an age, and at another a flash of a second to his enamoured lordship, Carlotta entered the room.

How lovely she looked in her simple dress of white muslin with black lace, her dark hair brushed from her pure white brow, and her eyes lit up with a gentle sympathy he had never seen there before, Lord Crownbrilliant could not have described.

His heart beat like a small bird against its prison bars, his face flushed, and for once as he

came forward and took her hand he was perfectly natural.

What she said or what he said they neither of them knew, one feeling only of extreme joy running through him as he glanced at the black lace on her dress and thought that at least they had one thing in common—bereavement.

He did not remember that hers was indeed a bereavement, while his was merely the removal of the impediment to the title and estates of Crownbrilliant.

Love is apt to be blind, even to itself.

They walked through the garden into the conservatories, where Lady Mildred left them to fetch her sunshade.

His lordship, finding himself alone with his idol, got crimson and uneasy, but, stealing a glance at the regal face of his companion, was somewhat restored to his self-possession and affectation by seeing that it was calm and perfectly unmoved.

"Pwetty flower," he said, toying with a camellia. "Nice for one's coat. I know a fellow whose mother used to lock him out of the conservatawies because he picked the flowers."

Carlotta raised her eyebrows.

"That was cruel, though perhaps necessary," she said. "Shall I give you this?"

"Will you?" he said, eagerly.

"Oh, yes," she replied, with the calm indifference which made her so irresistible, "if you will promise not to tell Lady Mildred."

"I promise," he said.

And Carlotta took a pair of tiny scissors from the stand and cut the flower off.

"There it is," she said, holding it out to him while she replaced the scissors.

He took it from her eagerly, and, pressing it to his lips, placed it in his coat.

She seemed not to have noticed the action, and stood as calm and still in the bright

sunlight as Pygmalion's statue before it caught the breath of life.

"How is the wiver getting on?" he asked, leaning over the light oak fence and gazing at it.

"Getting on," she repeated, with a smile. "Very nicely and very quickly. See!" and she dropped a leaf in the stream.

He dropped another, which, owing to a sudden stoppage of the first, caught it up.

"They have joined company," he said, eagerly. "See; they are dwifting down together."

And he pointed to the two leaves.

"So they are," said Carlotta.

"Life is like a stweam," he said, coming nearer to her and playing with a branch that touched her arm—he dared not touch the arm itself. "Life is like a stweam, Miss Lawley; men and women are like—leaves, eh?"

Carlotta inclined her head.

"That's very pretty," she said, with a smile

that barely escaped being scornful. "It sounds like Tennyson."

"Does it?" he said, looking pleased. - "By Jove! Tennyson's a clever fellow. He wites verses, you know."

Carlotta raised her eyebrows.

"You have read them?" she said, with a slight surprise, which his lordship entirely misunderstood.

"Oh, yes. I've wead them every one. You're astonished at a fellow having time for that s-s-sort of thing—eh? Oh, I'm very fond of poetry, I assure you. I always was. I could wepeat the whole of D-D-Dr. Watt's hymns when I was six years old. T-T-That's not bad, Miss Lawley."

"On the contrary, very good," replied Carlotta, almost wearily. "You will be sorry to hear that I never knew one of Dr. Watts' hymns or any one else's."

"No, no, I shan't," he replied, warmly. "I d-don't care anything about your knowing

hymns. I, by Jove! I don't think I know one myself now," he added, ingenuously. "Hymns are a nuisance, except in church. Miss Lawley, are you going to church on Sunday?"

"Oh, yes," said Carlotta. "Lady Mildred never misses, you know."

"I shall go then," he said, decisively.

Then there came a silence, both leaning over the palings, she standing majestically at his side, both looking at the river.

"Miss Lawley, I'm going to buy a house d-down here," said he.

She started the slightest in the world.

"Yes," she said.

"Yes. I like Grassmere. It's very nice. Don't you like it?"

"Yes, very much."

"I'm glad of that," he said, eagerly. "Well, I'm going to look out for a little box near here. Mr. Gregson says there is one to be sold on the Annsleigh woad—belonged to a

captain, he said, I think. Do you remember the one I mean?"

"Oh, yes, the Retreat."

"Yes, the Wetweat. Nice name, isn't it? Is it a n-nice place?"

"Yes, very beautiful," said Carlotta, staring at the stream, and avoiding his eyes, which were fixed on hers.

"You like it?" he asked.

"Yes; it is a very pretty place," she replied.

"Then I'll buy it," he replied, emphatically. "I'll buy it whatever it costs. Miss Lawley, you wonder what makes me so anxious to g-get the p-place? It's because you like it. I——"

"Here is Lady Mildred," said Carlotta, and she turned her face, which was deadly white, towards the house. "It is luncheon time, I expect."

"I won't stay, thank you," said his lordship, flushing. "I'm going at once, Lady Mildred. Horse tired of waiting, quite restless. Good-morning, Lady Mildred. Good-morning, Miss

Lawley," and, pressing Carlotta's icy hand, he vaulted into the saddle and galloped off, muttering :—

"By Jove! how beautiful, he! he! I frightened her—white as a ghost. All wight, Clarence, old boy, all wight!"

She went back to the garden and the river, but murmured nothing ; perhaps she was fully occupied in listening to the stream, which seemed to mutter brokenly as it swept over the pebbles :

"You will keep your oath and break my heart."





CHAPTER IV.

"When desperate men are brought to bay
'Tis well to think of action." CONGREVE.

"Pursuer, close upon pursued, they run
As close a race as shade and sun."

SCARCELY a quarter of an hour had elapsed since the wily Italian had glided down the old worm-eaten stairs of the house in Chelsea when a firmer tread sounded on them, and a tall, majestically built figure unlocked the door and entered the room in which Spazzola had stood petrified with astonishment.

Removing his soft, broad-brimmed hat, and placing it on the table, the occupant of the room dropped into the hard chair with a weary gesture and a sigh.

"What next?" he muttered, looking round

the room. "Light nearly gone—too late to paint. Would to heaven it were sometimes too dark and too late to think! That poor child I have left—she had the blue eyes, clear, terrestrial, far-seeing, that only those have who are already on their journey home. She will die to-night, or to-morrow, or the day after. *Cui bono?* What matters it? The fruit will moisten her pretty, bird-like throat," he mused, taking up a piece of crayon and almost unconsciously sketching the outline portrait of some poor child he had been visiting or benefiting. "Bah!" he continued, crushing the crayon with his fingers and flinging it into the grate with an air of utter weariness and despair. "What a hypocrite art thou, Maurice! Thou thinkest the child has won upon thee by her misery, her helplessness. Thou knowest 'tis because there is a something in her face that thou thinkest like the girl's face thou lovest. Charity! It is but another name for self. *Vanitas! vanitas!*

"Nine! 'Tis time I went out. Yet why should I? To what purpose? I am weary and shall not escape myself by treading the waterside or pacing the narrow streets any better than by sitting here. Oh, God, how slowly the time goes! I fear I shall never see it fly again. 'Tis a lame bird for Maurice Durant. Ten it strikes!—later than I thought. Now for supper," and he turned to the piece of bread upon the table. "Supper! Why should I eat? To live. Why should I live? Oh, bitter question! What other answer is there than the mocking one, 'To die?'" and he dropped the crust upon the table, burying his face in his hands and leaning his elbows on the hard deal.

An hour passed him sitting thus motionless, tearless, yet filled with a weary despair that was worse than death. Then, as the sound of the clocks striking eleven boomed heavily through the air he started, and, going to a small cupboard, took down from a peg a violin, and,

leaning against the window, with his face turned towards the starlit sky, commenced playing.

As the sweet, subtle melody filled the room and turned it to a very Paradise of sound, its delicious strains won his soul from the despair it had fallen into, and gradually, as his long, white fingers caressed the instrument, and brought forth from it a childlike, simple ballad of ineffable sweetness and mournfulness, his eyes filled with tears, his lips quivered, and his face lit up, as did the faces of the martyrs of old when, with the glare of the fire in their eyes, they saw heaven's gates swinging slowly back to let them in.

Suddenly, in the very midst of a strain which the world would have poured out its gold with a lavish hand to purchase, the strange player ceased, dropped his bow, sprang to the middle of the floor, and, stooping, picked up a piece of paper which lay there.

Carrying it to the window, he held it up to the moonlight, and ground out an imprecation

between his teeth. On the paper was the imprint of a man's foot.

"Some one has been here!" he muttered. "The foot is too small for mine. The paper was unsoiled when I left it."

With his face as dark as a thunder-cloud, he stole to the cupboard and took a revolver from a shelf, then noiselessly glided to the door, the moonlight streaming on his grand form and lighting up his wild, lion-like head.

Cautiously he unlocked the door, and quickly threw it open.

No one there. The landing, the stairs empty. Children's voices floating up from the street below.

He breathed hard, lowered the revolver, and threw his head back; then, re-entering the room, lit a candle, and, with a gesture as if a sudden thought had struck him, again went outside, and, kneeling down, examined the tablet of the lock.

There were a number of scratches lately

made ; they shone bright and new in the garish flicker of the candle.

With a growl of anger he started to his feet, and, panting like a trapped tiger, paced the room.

"Tracked at last—but by whom?" he muttered, "whom? whom? Who could have picked that lock so deftly? No London thief, no clumsy apprentice to the trade, no bungler. A master hand turned that lock with so little damage. Whose—whose—whose but Spazzola's? Great heaven! If I had found him here our account should have been balanced! Spazzola! That sleek, slender hound, that bloodthirsty, avaricious tiger! I must begone at once—to-night! Oh, God! is there no rest, no peace on the face of the earth? Where have I not been, where have I not ventured to fly from my fate? and here, here, where at least one would think there were safety and secrecy, I am tracked—tracked by Spazzola!"

A creak on the stairs.

"Hist! what is that?" he hissed, starting and clutching his soft felt hat. "What is that? Spazzola, by his cat-like tread! He is coming nearer—nearer. Another minute and I am lost!" and he looked round the room, clutching his revolver in a grasp of iron, his head thrown back, his body held like a hound in leash. "Ah!" he muttered, "the window!" and springing to it he unfastened its rusty catch, threw it open, and stepped out on to the rickety parapet, from which the time-eaten plaster fell in a small stream.

Scarcely had he done so than the door, which he had left half open, was gently pushed back, and the Italian entered the room.

Looking round with an eager gaze, his face fell blankly, and he hissed out an oath. At that moment, however, the window, which the fugitive had, of course, been unable to fasten, blew open, and the Italian, with a frightful imprecation, sprang to it.

Directly his hand touched its ledge, a sharp

report rang through the air. The Italian clapped his hand to his shoulder, and, with a shriek, fell to the ground, overturning the easel, and smashing the window in his descent.

Waiting one moment to hear if his pursuer still followed, the fugitive thrust the revolver in his breast, and, dropping down on his hands and knees, commenced the perilous journey along the mouldering parapet.

Three houses had been built of the same height, with parapets connecting them. Beyond that all was uncertain, for a turn in the street hid it from his view.

At every step small pieces of the stonework loosened and fell from beneath his hands and feet into the gardens below. He dared not look down ; the depth was great ; the fall, should he stumble or lose his hold, certain death. Yet there was no fear in his heart, only a dogged resolve to go on and reach the end, let it be what it might.

Once or twice he paused and listened intently,

but after the first crash there was no sound in his wake, and only the dull murmur of the few passers-by in front.

He crawled to the end of the turn and looked down. The next house had been built considerably lower than the rest. There was a drop, did he intend proceeding, of some feet on to a small ledge of stone or compo. The red-bricked tiles could not be trusted, the water-pipe shook as his hand passed over it. Turn he could not. No window was open through which he could creep, had he felt so inclined. He must drop.

To a man who had scaled the highest mountains of ice and snow, shot the deadliest and swiftest rapids, slain the most ferocious of wild beasts in single encounter, the drop was nothing, had it not been for the danger of an alarm should the ledge slip and throw him on to the shaky tiles or into the garden beneath. In both cases there would be a noise, and he would have to give an explanation of his presence and

strange behaviour. In the latter case he might break his leg, and thus destroy all chance of escape from the man who was even now, perhaps, recovering from his shot and preparing to follow.

Thinking thus, and scanning the depth below, his eyes lit up with a strange, desperate fire, he felt for the revolver.

"Five barrels more, Spazzola!" he muttered, and, drawing himself up, he lowered his legs over the parapet, clutched the rickety stonework with his white, iron-like hands, then dropped.

One slight crash, that might have been occasioned by a wandering cat, and there he was, as far as detection went, safe.

Leaping to the ground, he drew his revolver out, and crept stealthily through the garden into the road.

Not a soul in sight.

With the same caution, keeping well under the shadow of the old houses, he hastened up

the street; then, gaining a broad thoroughfare, he hailed a cab, and told the man to drive in the direction of London.

His face, as the light streamed on it from a wayside lamp, was white as death—not with fear, but rage—his teeth closed tightly, and his eyes like a lion's that, though it has escaped the hunter's toils, still growls vengeance on its pursuers.

* * * *

About ten miles from Grassmere, on the London road, there stood a small public-house, low-roofed, broad-eaved, and comfortable. The landlord of this hostel, whose name was Gregory—simply Gregory, whether surname or Christian could not be discovered—was sitting on the wide bench in the sun, and thinking it was almost time for tea, when a tall figure turned the corner of the dusty road, and approached him.

"Hullo! here he is," said Mr. Gregory, half fearfully, wholly reverentially, adding aloud:

"Good even, sir."

The stranger inclined his head, and, seating himself on the little wooden table that was cooking in the sun, said :

"Have you the dog?"

"Oh, yes, sir ; as right as a trivet."

"He is well, you say ? Where have you kept him ?"

"In the stable, sir, where you ordered him to be kept."

"Has any one seen him ?"

"No, sir ; no one excepting me or Bill, the ostler, sir. We told them as the dog were a little bit touched, and that stopped their cooriosity."

"And you have told no one that you had him ?"

"Not a soul—not me nor Bill," was the reply, honestly enough, as the speaker's clear, simple eyes attested.

"Have there been any inquiries?"

"Oh, a deal, your honour," replied the man.

"Sir Fielding, up at Grassmere, was making inquiries everywhere. His gamekeeper came down here, asking, quite friendly like, if I had seen a gentleman with a dog, or heard of him. But I told him I hadn't, and as my word is pretty well taken in these parts, where I have lived ever since I were as old as that child"—pointing to a little girl toddling round the door, with her finger in her mouth—"he believed me."

"Good," said the stranger. "You may bring the dog out to-night in the wood there. I will meet you at eleven o'clock. There is what I promised you, and a like sum added to it," and he dropped a small pile of gold into the man's hand.

The simple fellow stared, then looked at the gold and shook his head.

"This is a deal o' money, sir," he said, hesitatingly.

"I am glad you are satisfied," was the curt reply. "So long as you are silent concerning the dog and myself I will give you the same

sum every six months. If you prefer to talk and chatter I will find some means to make you repent your gossip in addition to the loss of the money," and he frowned heavily.

The countryman threw his head back, with a sturdy look on his face, although it had grown pale, as he replied :

"I don't know who you be, sir. I'm thinking you must be a great person—perhaps the duke himself ; but I know you ain't used to deal with common people, or you'd know an honest man when you see him. I'm not a rich man, your honour, but I'm a'most sorry to see you, because o' the dog, which I've got to grow fond of. As to betraying you after all this money, I couldn't do it, and it didn't need any more, neither," and, breaking off his incoherent speech abruptly, the man put the extra gold back on the table.

The dark, heavily-browed eyes that watched him grew less stern, and the hard mouth less inflexible.

"You are wrong. I know an honest man when I see him. Put up the gold, bring the dog to-night, keep your promise, and you will find that I shall keep mine."

Then, before Gregory could make any reply save the reverential bend of the head, the wayfarer had gone on his way.





CHAPTER V.

"She's beautiful, and therefore to be wooed ;
She's a woman, therefore to be won."

"Some certain dregs of conscience are yet within me."

"Little shall I grace my cause
In speaking for myself."

"Let no man abide this deed
But we the doers."

THERE was once to be seen in the city which, perhaps, the French still call the Metropolis of the world, a small picture by a clever young artist, representing Cupid, the God of Love, daintily attired in a soup-basin hat, braining a pair of turtle doves with a croquet mallet. It was a clever idea, and not far from being a truthful one, for there are more love-matches

made over and through croquet during the season than any other game extant.

Being fully aware of this fact, the Misses Gregson coaxed their papa into giving a croquet party, and issued invitations to half the country.

It was to be a "gathewing of the c-c-clans," as Lord Crownbrilliant expressed it, and a great number of acceptations were expected.

Mr. Gregson having once given way to his daughters' "confounded nonsense," immediately set about making the best of the matter, and brought down a host of workmen from town to build gorgeous marquees of crimson and gold, erect artificial shrubberies and solid-looking fountains, and turn the Folly grounds into as close an imitation of the Versailles gardens as they could possibly be made.

For two weeks before the event the house, as Tom said, was "flung out of window."

Great *chefs* took possession of the kitchen, cunning artificers seized the drawing-rooms and

knocked them into theatres,—for there were to be some charades played by a London troupe of actors, specially engaged.

Decorators marched up and down the hall, and the family were driven in despair to the only places of refuge—the dining-room and bed chambers.

“It’s a dreadful piece of fuss,” admitted Miss Lavinia.

“A confounded nuisance,” growled Tom.

“A diabolical piece of stupidity!” roared his father.

But although every one was out of temper with the nuisance, stupidity, or fuss, each and all were persuaded that it was the proper thing to do, and that good results would follow, although if asked of what nature were the good results they expected, they would severally have been rather puzzled to say.

Notwithstanding Tom’s repeated assurance for weeks beforehand that the particular Monday fixed on for the *fête* would be a wet one, the

day opened with a glorious burst of sunshine and without a single cloud.

The invitations had been very freely accepted, and a shining host of betitled people was expected.

There were to be Lord Cornthwaite, the greatest and grandest man in Armsthorpe, with my lady and their son; the Marquis of Graventon, a most frightful character, who in any other rank in life would have been sent abroad for his country's good, but was only head-shaken at by the chaperones and mothers of marriageable daughters, and called, not without a spark of admiration, "a naughty man," or, at worst, "a *roué*."

Then there were the Marquis of Townston and the marchioness—people who never walked or rode save behind the best blood, and were known to be the wealthiest people in the country, and credited with being the wealthiest in the world.

With them were expected their neighbours,

the Honourable Holdens, who were as poor as church mice, but whose blood was reputed to be the colour of a blue-bag.

These physiological curiosities would have refused the invitation, scorning to pass the threshold or tread the lawn of a Manchester merchant, had not Sir Fielding Chichester, whose blood was as cerulean as their own, and Lord Crownbrilliant taken care to let them know they were going.

The Chichesters, Lady Mildred, Lord Crownbrilliant, and the heads of Ansleigh, of course, accepted, and a shoal of literary, artistic, and eccentric noblemen, who had been captured with Lord Crownbrilliant's assistance, made up the list.

An invitation had been sent to the Rectory—that is to say it had been dropped into the slit of the old gate—but it might have been inserted through the palings of the Durant family vault for all notice that was taken of it.

At ten o'clock the distinguished company

began to arrive, and for two hours the gravel-drives were cut up by prancing horses and magnificent equipages.

The Gregsons found their hands quite full in the matter of reception, but they were backed up by Sir Fielding and Lord Crownbrilliant; and by constantly reiterating the assertion that the Folly was Liberty Hall, and taking the guests to the gorgeous marquees, in which refreshments of the choicest and most elaborate kinds were displayed, got through very well.

A military band was stationed in the grounds, and around it, collected in groups, were the early arrivals, waiting for the striking of the hoops and the commencement of the croquet.

In one of these stood the Honourable Chandos Holden and the Marquis of Graven-ton, talking together in languid tones, and criticising their surroundings in extremely cynical ones.

"Tremendous place," said the marquis.
"Never saw grounds better laid out."

"No," assented the honourable. "The old fellow knows how to do things. No end of money all this sort of thing costs. He can afford it, though, that's one thing."

"Pretty rich?" asked the Marquis.

"Diabolically," replied the other. "The three cubs will have a fortune each. Nothing like Manchester. I know a man who says this Gregson has made two millions—hush! Here's the boy and his sister. Mr. Gregson, I was just saying to the marquis that I never saw a more beautiful place. Holden Chase will be an eyesore to me after this. Such taste! Exquisite, by Jove!"

"Exquisite indeed!" echoed the marquis, bestowing one of his killing smiles upon Miss Bella, who coloured beneath it vividly.

"I am glad you like it," she said. "Have you been to the conservatories?"

"Not yet; I've only just come," replied the marquis. "I will go to them at once if you will tell me that they are only one half so pretty as this."

Miss Bella smiled, and the marquis, offering his arm, begged her to play escort, and away they went.

"Fond of horses?" said Tom, left alone with the honourable, and in despair for conversation.

"Very," replied the aristocrat, eyeing the plebeian with critical glass.

"I can show you a fast one, I think," said Tom, "if you like to walk round to the stables."

And so the honourable was disposed of.

In another group stood Lord Cornthwaite and Clarence Gervaise, the landscape painter. His lordship was a lover of art, and therefore ran to artists with fervour.

"Pretty little picture of yours, Gervaise," he was saying. "Sold?"

"Yes, Lord Browntons bought it. Gave my man Davies a cool thousand."

"Heavy!" remarked his lordship.

"Very!" laughed the fortunate artist, "but Browntons can afford it. By George! there's a splendid bit of colour. Who is she?"

And he cast a glance in the direction of Carlotta, who at that moment entered the grounds, dressed in a white satin with black lace falling on it, and glittering here and there with some antique ornament of a character quite unknown to the fashionables assembled.

Her hair was brushed from her forehead as usual, but bound up at the back in thick, heavy coils, that would not have shamed a Cleopatra.

"Don't know," said his lordship. "Who's that old lady with—Oh, by Jove, that's Lady Mildred. I can get the introduction. Hullo! here's Crownbrilliants."

And he stopped to shake hands with that individual, who was walking in the direction of Lady Mildred and Carlotta.

"Ah, Cornthwaite," he drawled. "Glad to see you, by Jove. Pwetty gwounds, eh? Seen Mr. Gwegson? Nice old boy. Mr. Gervaise, think we've met before. I admiwerd that p-p-picture of yours immensely. Gwand! Simply gwand!"

"Do you know that beauty?" said Cornthwaite. "Gervaise and I want an introduction."

"Who? W-which?" stammered Lord Crownbrilliant, staring about, although he knew perfectly well whom Lord Cornthwaite meant.

"The one in satin and lace," was the reply.

"Oh, yes; that's Miss Lawley. Staying with Lady Mildwed. Want an introduction? Come along."

And the three went off. Lord Crownbrilliant, with a flush of colour in his face as he shook hands with her ladyship and Carlotta, introduced his friends, and then reluctantly obeyed a look from an old dowager who had known his father, and himself since his infancy, and crossed over to her.

At three o'clock Sir Fielding, Maud, and Chudleigh arrived, and Maud found herself speedily surrounded by a throng of respectful admirers, who claimed acquaintance with her on the score of friendship for her father.

Her pale, sweet, fresh loveliness was particularly bewitching for the *blasé* men of society, and every step she took some exquisite or other turned to make an inaudible note of genuine admiration.

When croquet began the groups broke up, and the band recommenced playing.

Lord Crownbrilliant, Carlotta, and Miss Bella found themselves together in one set, while Maud and Tom Gregson were parcelled into another.

Chudleigh was chained to a pretty little girl in the archery ground, and, with his usual good nature, was vainly endeavouring to teach her how to use the bow, while his fine eyes constantly wandered to the noble figure of Carlotta in the distance.

Lord Crownbrilliant hated croquet, as he did every other game which necessitated his standing in the hot sun for any length of time, and Carlotta was scarcely one to be particularly delighted with knocking wooden balls through

hoops, so that it is little wonder their side came off the losers.

"By Jove!" murmured his lordship, shaking his head with a would-be regretful smile. "We've lost, eh? I'm vewy sowwy. I said I couldn't play, you know."

"And you can't—not a bit," muttered a young gentleman, who, being devotedly attached to the game, and unfortunately on his lordship's side, was rather savage.

"Never mind, b-better next time," he added, with woeful cheerfulness, sucking his mallet. "Play again, Miss Lawley?" he asked, anxiously.

"No; I am rather hot," said Carlotta. "Let me go and get a substitute."

Lord Crownbrilliant looked delighted.

"W-wait a minute," he said. "There's Ponsonby and his sister waiting to come in. I'll go and ask them."

And he went over and brought the pair up.

"Where is Lady Mildred, I wonder?" said Carlotta, resting her hand upon his arm lightly.

"Lady Mildred? In the conservatory," replied Lord Crownbrilliant, promptly, who remembered seeing her ladyship at the end of the lawn behind. "We will go and find her."

"Thank you," said Carlotta, unsuspectingly, and they walked off in the direction of the huge glass buildings near the house.

"Lucky dog, Crownbrilliant," whispered little Lord Cripson to his neighbour, Mrs. Vavasour,— "got the beauty in his toils."

"I don't know," replied that lady, nibbling her ice, and looking wise—as she was. "Not a very great catch, my lord."

"No money?" asked Cripson, who was too old a friend of the lady's to be bashful.

"Not a penny," was the reply.

"Ah," said his lordship, with evidently cooling admiration.

"I don't see Lady Mildred," said Carlotta when they had reached the centre of the arti-

ficial world of nature, where stood a rustic fountain, from which the water sprang up through a woman's clasped fingers upraised in prayer, until it moistened the clinging leaves above. "I do not think she is here."

"At the other end, pwaps," said Lord Crown-brilliant. "Won't you sit down a little while and west?" and he brushed some leaves from a rock seat for her.

Carlotta sank into it, but still looked up and down the tessellated pavements.

"Ah, there is Miss Gregson," she said, getting a glimpse of that young lady's expensive crimson costume through a parting of the leaves. "Let us go to her."

"Not for a minute or two," pleaded his lordship. "It would be a pity to disturb Miss Gwegson; she is evidently quite engwossed. West a little while in the cool, and I will go and get you an ice."

"Not an ice, thanks," she said. "I'm not so hot, "but I will rest a little while."

And she leaned back, with her large, clear eyes fixed upon the floor.

"I'd give a thousand pounds for your thoughts," said he, rather timidly, bending over her.

"They are not worth a thousand farthings," she replied, looking up at him calmly.

"Then will you tell me them?" he drawled.

"Oh, yes," she replied, "if you like. I was thinking how badly you play croquet."

"Were you, by Jove?" he exclaimed, gazing at her with wondering admiration. "D-do you like cwoquet?"

"Not much," she replied.

"Nor I," he said, looking pleased. "That's stwange, isn't it? Do you know—he! he!—it's vewy widiculous, but I was thinking the game of life was vewy like the game of cwoquet?"

"How?" she said, scarcely hearing him, her eyes fixed upon the tall form of Chudleigh Chichester as he stood talking to Mrs. Vavasour

and looking round—as she could plainly see—with eager yet painfully searching eyes. “Was he looking for her?” she thought.

“He! he!—it is widiculous. One has such stwange ideaws sometimes. Y-e-es. This is what I th-thought. Men and women are like the balls, the hoops are the incidents and a-a-accidents of life, the mallets are the f-fates, and the lawn, the gwound, you know, is the course of twue love.”

She looked up with a weary smile, and, speaking more to herself than to him, said :

“How so, my lord? ‘True love,’ says the proverb, ‘never runs smooth.’”

“The pwoverb is wong,” exclaimed his lordship, eagerly, “at l-least, sometimes. Don’t you believe in pwoverbs, they’re so widiculous. Why shouldn’t twue love wun smooth when there are all the th-things to make it?”

She bowed her head.

“I cannot answer,” she said. “I don’t know, therefore I am beaten. Go on.”

"Where?" exclaimed the peer, his pretty little similitude having flown from his narrow brain long ago. "Oh, ah, yes—by Jove!—weally forgot. Where was I?—oh, well, the winning post is matwimony, and that's all. There's nothing more left—he! he!" counting up on his fingers, "balls, men and women; mallets, fate; lawn, twue love; post, matwimony—y-e-s, that's all."

"It is very pretty," said Carlotta. "Where did you read it?"

"Nowhere, 'pon honour," exclaimed his lordship, triumphantly. "Perfectly owiginal, I assure you," then suddenly: "You're making fun of me, Miss Lawley?"

"No, no, I am not," she said, almost eagerly, arousing herself with a start, and smiling coldly up in his face.

"Are you sure?" he asked, screwing his eyes up searchingly, and shaking his golden hair slowly. "I'm so glad. I hate you to make fun of me, Car—Miss Lawley, I mean. You

know I do, don't you? I'm afwaid you always think I'm vewy widiculous."

"No, I do not," she said, turning her face away with an apprehension of what was coming that made her feel cold and faint.

"Let us go and find Lady Mildred."

"Oh, no, not this minute!" he said, flushing, and dropping into the seat by her side. "Don't go this minute, Car—Miss Lawley. I want to speak to you—if I dare; you'll listen to me, won't you? I—Carlotta, I love you. I—you know I do; any fellow could see that l-long ago."

Struggling on with his softened "r's" and drawling voice quickened by the excitement, he paused at last for breath, and, clutching at her hand nervously, waited for her to speak.

How wondrous is the human heart! Struggling with her feelings of blank despair and horror, she remembered years after the thrill of triumph that she felt as she compared

this idiot's babbling to the noble flood of words, the flashing eyes of that other one who had asked and taken his refusal like a man.

"Oh, speak! oh, speak, Carlotta!" exclaimed the exquisite, with puny accents. "Tell me you l-love me!" then he stopped, for her cold, dreamy face startled him. "Are y-you ill?" he asked, aghast.

"Give me time," she gasped, as if for air. "Give me till to-night," she pleaded, pushing his hand away with her own icy one,

"No, no!" he exclaimed, catching at her arm, and drawing her towards him. "Now—now!—let me know if you love me, and will be Lady Crownbrilliants."

Was it possible that he knew the winning card, that he should play it at this critical moment?

"Now," he repeated, putting his other arm round her waist. "Come, Carlotta, s-say yes!"

A shudder ran through her frame, but her voice was cold, calm, unquivering and even clear, as, summoning all her strength, she looked down upon him and said :

" Yes."





CHAPTER VI.

"Oh, 'tis the curse in love, and well approv'd,
When women cannot love where they're belov'd."

WITH sunset ended croquet and the outdoor amusements; the band, recruited by fresh members, removed to Mr. Gregson's handsome dining-room, where a splendid repast was laid out, to which the guests were thronging with an interest born of good appetites.

Sir Fielding, who had been greatly amused all the morning by watching the various groups, now filled a comfortable seat near the head of the table, and commenced a conversation with a literary lion who wrote popular novels and wore a majestic mane of bright chestnut hair.

Chudleigh was seated next the Marchioness De Corby, a radiant young wife of twenty, and found his time not so fully occupied but that he could glean a moment or two to watch the bent head of Lord Crownbrilliant, which completely hid the beautiful one of Carlotta from his view. All the morning Chudleigh had been seeking that face, and now——

“Let me give you some of this *pâté*. I can recommend it.”

“No, thank you; but I should like some salad.”

“Certainly. Salad, please. Did you win at croquet? Of course; why do I ask? I remember seeing the Marchioness De Corby’s name on the champion list at Eglinton,” and so on through the whole wearisome land of small talk.

“Carlotta,” whispered his lordship, “p-pledge me in a glass of Moselle. What is that s-song, ‘Dwink to me only with thine eyes’? Know it? Pwetty song, s-s-specially the words.

Come, you must take a good sip"—and he filled her glass—"and say after me 'I pledge you, Carlotta'—no, not Carlotta; I say that, but C-Clawence. Clawence is my name, you know—one of them, that is. I've m-more than half a dozen, he! he! Now t-then, I p-pledge you, Carlotta," he whispered, raising his glass and smiling at her with a victorious flush on his carefully-preserved cheek; and she for the first time lifted her glass and her eyes, which met the stern, sorrowful regard of the dark, pained ones opposite.

"No, no," she whispered, almost hoarsely, setting the glass down again, "I cannot drink now."

"All wight," replied his lordship, cheerfully, though looking slightly disappointed. "It's a bore dwinking when you're not thirsty," but he, it is to be presumed, was thirsty, for he emptied his glass.

At the head of the table Mr. Gregson discussed politics with two advanced Liberal lords,

and was good enough to lower his voice and his sentiments, so that he was not quite unbearable.

Miss Bella was placed next the dissipated marquis, and was discovering that their tastes agreed on every point—croquet, waltzing, dance music, and acting—so it is to be inferred that she was content.

Her sister had taken a boy lord in tow, and was making careful play. Both, to use a sporting phrase, were “running well,” as Mrs. Gregson smilingly noted from her post beside an aged peer, slightly deaf and very fidgety, who had sworn at one of the servants and broken two of the best glasses.

Maud sat listening to a discourse on the poetry of the last Academy pictures, delivered by Cecil Gervaise—listening gratefully, and with a light in her lovely eyes that the young artist felt repaid him all his eloquence while it tortured him with its beauty—tortured him, because he knew he was powerless, clever

artist though he was, to reproduce even the shadow of it.

The rest of the illustrious company ate, drank, talked politics, intrigued, and flirted, according to their several inclinations, and found every facility for doing each and all.

Dinner over, the ladies retired to the drawing-room, to gaze at the proscenium of the little theatre and wonder if the actors would be punctual.

Carlotta sank into an ottoman behind a window curtain, and looked out upon the lawn with thoughtful eyes. Maud, who had been seeking her all the morning, caught the glitter of the white dress and went over to her.

"Carlotta, where have you been hiding all the morning?" she said, sinking on to a low seat at her feet, and looking up lovingly into the dark, impenetrable eyes.

"Hiding!" repeated Carlotta, shrinking from her touch, yet summoning a smile to her cold face. "Hiding? Nowhere. I have seen you

once or twice. There are so many people here."

"Yes, are there not? and they seem so happy and amused. Are you enjoying yourself?"

Carlotta started and looked at her scrutinizingly. Was she showing the storm of agony that was raging within?

"Enjoying myself, dear Maud. Of course. Are not you?"

"Oh, yes," replied the gentle girl, sighing at the almost harsh tone of the other. "Oh, yes. Here is Miss Gregson."

"Now, Miss Chichester, I have come to implore you to play for us. Pray do not say no."

Gentle Maud rose without a word, and Carlotta, shrinking behind the curtain, was left to her own black thoughts.

"Sir Fielding, have you heard that Mr. Townley, your member for Annsleigh, is very ill?" asked the Honourable Mr. Howard, holding his glass for some wine.

"Yes," said Sir Fielding, "and I was very

sorry to hear it. This morning I sent my man over to inquire how he was progressing, but he had not returned when I left.

"My man caught me on the road," said Mr. Howard. "I regret to say that Mr. Townley has suffered a relapse."

"Dear me," said Sir Fielding, pityingly. "I hope——"

"Ah, so do I," rejoined the honourable, while two or three others echoed him. "Things are critical now, very; and we could not afford to lose the seat."

"Should we lose it?" asked Chudleigh, gravely.

Mr. Howard shook his head seriously.

The Honourable Mr. Howard was a Tory.

"The other side are strong," he said, in a meditative voice, "and pushing. The working-man movement has lifted them miles, and certainly I should be doubtful."

Sir Fielding glanced at Mr. Gregson, and saw that gentleman flash up.

"You need not be doubtful, Mr. Howard," he cried, in a triumphant voice, yet with just enough of respect in it to keep it from being offensive. "You would be sure to lose it. Warrington, the factory town, is incorporated with Annsleigh now, you know, and our interest there is strong."

"I was thinking of that," said Mr. Howard, smiling. "But be not too confident, Mr. Gregson; we fight hard, you know."

Mr. Gregson laughed heartily, but there was a malicious twinkle in his eye.

"It's a foregone conclusion," he said.

"We shall see," replied Mr. Howard, gravely.

"Mr. Townley is not dead yet," said Sir Fielding, gently, and the others coloured.

"And I hope he won't die," exclaimed Mr. Gregson, honestly. "I'd rather lose the seat than a neighbour."

This lucky speech set the company straight again, and Chudleigh seized the slight pause to introduce the hunting topic, knowing that the people round him were always willing to

hunt the fox, whether the ground were a rough bit of country or a shining mahogany table.

When the gentlemen reached the drawing-room the actors had arrived, and the band had commenced the overture.

Seated in comfortable chairs and lounges ranged in the form of an auditorium, the company thoroughly enjoyed both the rest and the farces, and when the curtain fell every one applauded most heartily.

Mr. Gregson looked delighted as the Marquis Lantry exclaimed, in a voice loud enough to be heard by every one in the room :

"Glorious! I never enjoyed anything so much in my life!" and a universal murmur of appreciation rose from the rest.

"They have played well," assented Mr. Gregson, with smiling self-satisfaction. "I am glad I thought of theatricals."

"A most happy idea," said Sir 'Fielding. "Ah, here they come before the curtain," and he joined in the plaudits.

"Now," said Mrs. Gregson, in an audible whisper to the ladies, as the lights were turned up, "I daresay they have covered the lawn in; let us go and see."

With surprise every one followed her out of the room, and walking on to the terrace, was astonished to find an enormous marquee erected on the lawn.

"A ball!" exclaimed the Honourable Miss Cornthwaite.

"Only a simple dance or two," simpered Miss Lavinia.

And in an instant the ladies had retired to rearrange their hair, deck themselves with flowers, and make other Terpsichorean preparations.

Smooth as velvet, the lawn was no more unpleasant to dance upon than a carpet, while the fresh summer air that stole through the crevices of the gaudy tent kept the spirits elevated, and made it impossible for any one to feel weary.

The croquet, the dinner, and the theatricals

had been a success, and now the ball promised to be a crowning triumph.

Chudleigh, who had danced the first quadrille with the little maiden who had been taking lessons in archery from him during the morning, found himself marvelling at the high spirits and astonishing gaiety of every one around him, forgetting that not every one was, like himself, troubled with the heartache.

Once or twice he caught sight of Carlotta ; both times she was dancing with Lord Crown-brilliants, and he had longed to leave the scene which brought him nothing but pain, but he had resolved to play the man and see the night out, so he stayed.

"Won't you have some wine, Mr. Chichester?" asked Tom Gregson, coming to him where he was lounging against one of the poles. "Come along. There's a deuce of a crush, but we can get through it."

And Chudleigh, who no more wanted wine than he did a washing-tub, consented to be

shown a particular corner of the long table where he could secure some quietly.

"I mustn't stay," said Tom, looking particularly happy; "Miss Chichester has been kind enough to give me the next dance."

"Off with you then," said Chudleigh, with assumed gaiety, and Tom hurried away.

The next was a waltz, and Chudleigh, hoping to lose something of his pain by a course of twirling, looked round for a partner.

"Will you give me this?" he said to Mrs. Vavaseur.

"With pleasure, Mr. Chichester," said that lady. "I could not refuse so old a friend."

"Nor so true a one," said Chudleigh, with a touch of his father's courtliness, and he led her off.

"Thanks, thanks," she breathed, when they had been whirling for some little while. "I have enjoyed that so much. You have my very step. Tell me Mr. Chudleigh, why do you not dance more?"

"I am getting an old man," said Chudleigh, with a smile that was not altogether a merry one.

The worldly beauty tapped him with her fan.

"That's a tacit reproach for me," she said, with a bewitching smile; "get me an ice, then you shall sit down."

Chudleigh got the ice and sank down into the seat beside her.

"What a number of people are here!" she said. "They have the pick of the county. Well, they deserve it, for I never knew anything better done."

"Capitally managed," assented Chudleigh; "everybody enjoying themselves immensely."

"Excepting Mr. Chudleigh Chichester," thought the lady, then aloud she said, "Do you know Miss Lawley? Lawley, isn't it—the lady in the white dress, with young Carsbrook? Lord Crownbrilliants is looking at her—see."

For Chudleigh had seemed slow in picking out the young lady alluded to.

"Oh, yes," he said indifferently, "very well."

"She is very nice, is she not?" asked Mrs. Vavaseur.

"Very," said Chudleigh, almost bitterly.

"I thought so," replied Mrs. Vavaseur. "One can always tell by a face. She flirts though, I am afraid. I have seen her with Lord Crownbrilliants in the true coquettish style. Ah, here is my next partner. My shawl?—thanks."

Chudleigh could endure it no longer, and, parting the curtains of the tent, stepped into the open air, followed by a burst of music, and the ripple and buzz of laughter.

"How much longer?" he muttered, pulling out his watch. "I have vowed to stop it through, or I would go. I would rather die a thousand times than stand by and watch her play with that idiot. Was it necessary to brazen it out so as to set the whole room agape? Oh, Carlotta, Carlotta!"

As the words were wrung from him in his

agony he fell into a rustic seat and hid his face in his hands.

The rustle of a dress startled him, and looking up he saw the woman he was calling upon come into the starlight.

In the dimness he could see that her face was white, and that her hand was pressed against her heart.

In a second his anger and bitterness had gone, and with all his love in his voice he murmured her name, and strode towards her.

She started, and with a suppressed murmur, turned her face towards him.

"Carlotta!" he breathed, huskily, "why do you shun me? At least you might have some pity——"

"Pity!" she murmured, vacantly staring at him with strained eyes.

"Yes, pity on me and yourself," he repeated, stretching out his hand to take her arm.

But she shrank back, and with a shudder of horror, cried piteously :

"Don't touch me—don't touch me!"

His heart seemed to die out in his bosom, and he said, brokenly :

"Carlotta, is it——"

"Too late—too late!" she moaned, covering her face with her quivering hands. "I am his!"

Chudleigh lifted his hands with a gesture of despair and entreaty, as a groan broke from his lips.

She was moved at the signs of his agony almost to madness ; she caught at his clenched hand, but at the next moment a man's figure came from the tent, and Lord Crownbrilliant's voice, thick with wine and excitement cried :

"C-Carlotta, I s-say, you promised me this last d-dance."

And the bent form raised itself to its full height as the beautiful voice—with a calmness that must have cost its owner untold agony—replied :

"And here I am, my lord—I never break my word."



CHAPTER VII.

"Love sought is good, but given unsought is better."

SHAKSPEARE.

"YOU both seem worn out," said Sir Fielding, leaning back amongst the cushions of the carriage as it sped towards the Hall, and stroking Maud's hand, which rested on his knee.

"I am rather tired," replied Maud, "and I am so glad they did not keep it up very late, although I have enjoyed myself much."

"It has been a long day," said Chudleigh, curtly, his head bowed upon his breast.

"A very successful one too, said Sir Fielding. "I am very glad. Gregson is a very worthy man—very. Heigh-ho!" yawning, "I am sleepy. Ah! what's that?" he added, quickly, as the

carriage was brought to a sudden stop, and the horses' hoofs could be heard stamping on the road.

Chudleigh opened the door and leaped out.

"What is the matter, Watson?" he asked of the coachman.

"I don't exactly know, sir," replied Watson. "The near horse started at something; indeed, they both seemed skeered."

"Frightened? Did you see or hear anything?" asked Chudleigh, listening himself.

"No-o. I fancied I saw something strike across the road, but I'm not sure, sir," replied Watson, whose vision was slightly affected by champagne and port from the servants' hall.

"Poachers," said Chudleigh, wearily, returning to the carriage. "Drive on, Watson."

And the horses, after a little coaxing, trotted off again.

It was about three o'clock when Maud stood

at her chamber door, with her tiny filagree candlestick in her hand, and kissed Sir Fielding and Chudleigh.

"Good night, dear Chud. I am not at all sleepy nor tired, but you look worn out."

"I am tired," said Chudleigh, avoiding her eyes. "Good-night, Maudie."

And taking her face in his hands he kissed her forehead, and went off to his own room.

"Poor Chud," murmured Maud, lovingly. "If I were Carlotta I think I could not help loving him."

Then she sighed, and, sitting before her glass, covered her face with her hands.

"I wish I felt tired," she murmured. "I shall not sleep for thinking. How glad I am to be at home alone again. I like to be alone—why, I wonder? Because when all is quiet I think of the soft, sweet music, and can see his grand, beautiful face!"

And, sighing, she unloosened the diamond

clasp on her head, and let her hair fall in a glorious shower on her shoulders.

As she did so she looked down and missed a little diamond cross that should have hung on her bosom.

"My cross!" she cried. "Papa's last gift! Oh, dear, what shall I do? Let me think. I had it when I started; it was safe when I was in the carriage, for I remember seeing it when I threw open my cloak for air. I must have dropped it on the stairs or in the room."

Then she looked round the floor, and about her feet, but could not see it.

"It must be on the stairs," she thought. "I wonder if I am brave enough to creep down and find it?"

After a moment's hesitation she took her candlestick, and, holding it above her head, softly opened the door and stole out on to the corridor. Stair by stair she searched, but in vain, and when she had examined the long hall where she had walked, and reached the door,

she felt convinced that the trinket had dropped from her neck when she alighted from the carriage.

"Papa's present," she murmured, gazing at the huge door wistfully. "I do not like to lose it, and I am sure it is lying on the steps. I wonder if I could unfasten the door? No—it is too heavy! Wait. If I am brave enough I could undo the drawing-room window, and walk round! I will do it."

And, nerving herself to a pitch of courage that astonished her, she drew the silken cloak round her head and stole into the drawing-room.

It required a continual repetition of "Papa's present" to keep her to her purpose, and her heart nearly stopped beating as the window creaked on its hinges and she stepped out into the night.

But the cool, fresh air sent a thrill of pleasure and renewed courage through her frame, and she ran lightly round to the front, by the grim

lions that rampant on the huge marble slabs, and stooped down to search for the cross.

"Ah! here it is. I knew it would be here!" she exclaimed, as she saw it at the foot of the stone steps, and she sprang towards it.

At the moment her fingers touched it, a burst of the low, sad music that she knew so well broke out upon the air, and floated towards her, and, pressing her hand to her bosom, she started to her feet, gazing in the direction from which it came with white cheeks and frightened eyes.

"He is here! here! He will see me!" she thought, and tried to dart away, but her feet seemed chained to the ground, powerless to move.

In two minutes the feeling of fear had given way to that of delight, the subtle melody was stealing over her senses.

"Near!" she murmured, through her parted lips. "Near! how near! It seems to call me. Does it, I wonder?"

The music grew more distinct.

To her ear it assumed a voice calling, commanding her.

Slowly she stretched forth her hands and, with every appearance of a somnambulist, moved quietly, slowly, in the direction of the wood.

Suddenly the music ceased, and with it the trance, if trance it was.

With a cry of love, alarm, surprise, all mingled, she stood still, and tremblingly wondered how she could get back.

While she stood so a sound broke upon her ear, and sent the blood to her heart in a rushing stream.

It was a groan.

Whose?

Whose else but Maurice Durant's who had summoned her by the heavenly music?

Casting off all fear, she sprang into the wood, her shining hair half escaping the silken hood, and falling in a sheen down her back.

Guided almost by instinct, she threaded the thick trees, and, with a sudden cry, fell on her knees beside the still figure of a man stretched upon the bright mossy grass.

"It is he!" she moaned, bending over the grand uplifted face of Maurice Durant, white, death-like, and set. "He is dead. No, no. Oh, dear! oh, dear! what shall I do? He may die!" and she threw her arms around him, as if by so doing she could hold him to life.

Then, with her hair falling in a flood upon her bosom, her agonised eyes, soft and luminous with the divinity of love, fixed upon his closed eyelids, her lips parted and letting the breath through in quick, noiseless, terrified gasps, she remained for a minute, then she shrank back, murmuring:

"If he recovers he may be angry with me, may hurt me!" and, oh, marvellous mystery of love, a thrill of delight ran through her at the thought of being in his hands, even though they clasped her in anger. "He may kill me.

What shall I do? Oh, Maud, Maud, courage! Water! Where is the stream?"

Quick as lightning she sprang to her feet and caught up the rough cap lying beside him, then ran to the stream; in a minute more she was bending over him, moistening his dry hot lips, and cooling his forehead, her fingers lingering each moment with a timid caress.

While she did this in the pale light of the stars the bushes behind her parted noiselessly, and a man's head was thrust forward.

As its dark, flashing eyes rested upon the two silent forms, they lit up with a blaze of savage glee, and a tawny, sunburnt hand was dashed against the full-lipped mouth to prevent the cry which the watcher in his joy almost uttered.

For two minutes he stood thus, drinking in the scene, then with a fiendish smile upon his sallow face he stole like an Indian from the spot.

At a hundred yards distance he paused, and, throwing up his hand, muttered:

"Am I dreaming? Am I mad, or have I found him again? Oh, ye saints, or fiends, how ye do befriend Spazzola. Found him again when all hope was gone,—found him, and how? Who is the beautiful girl? his light-o'-love? No; he has no light-o'-loves. Ah! I have it. Spazzola, your fortune is made—thank the girl for it. Oh, ye fiends, smile on, keep the luck with Spazzola still, and he is made," and muttering huskily, with a savage joy in his leopard eyes, he crept on.

At the fringe of the wood he stopped and imitated the cry of the cuckoo.

It was echoed once, twice, then three men came forward stealthily and soft-footed, like panthers.

"Well?" asked the first, the thick-set ruffian we have seen in the public-house at Hatton Garden, "well?"

"No avail, *mio amico*! The house is bare and naked. Everything gone but a dog!"

He shuddered.

"What! a bloodhound?" asked the Englishman, in a tone of disgust.

"Ay, a bloodhound. Bah! I think I feel his fangs at my throat now."

With a thrill of horror the three men shook their heads.

"Confound it!" growled the man called Bill. "I 'ate a bloodhound, and I ain't a goin' in for one. Look here, this crib's no go——"

Spazzola shook his head decisively.

"We're agreed on that. Well, let's go in for the other."

"Soh! it is done!" said the Italian.

"No, it ain't, not nearly," returned Bill, in a tone of contempt, not understanding the Italian's peculiar mode of expressing himself. "You talk as if cracking a crib were as easy as cly-faking. You don't know anything about the bis'ness. Leave this job to me; wait about the crib so as to bear a hand if anything goes wrong, and I'll share like and like, swelp me never!"

Nodding their dark heads assentingly, the three Italians dropped on their hands and knees to follow the English burglar, Spazzola looking back over his shoulder with a gleaming eye at the dark outline of the desolate Rectory.

Maud, watching the still, white face, with its heavy lines drawn by the hands of sorrow and privation, saw, after she had bathed the cold forehead, which was as white as her own, the lips move with an expression of consciousness. Shrinking back with a feeling of thankfulness, not unmixed with alarm, she waited for some other sign of returning life.

It came. Raising his hand to his head, Maurice Durant felt the water upon his brow, opened his eyes, and seeing a figure kneeling beside him, sprang to his feet with a fierce scowl.

Maud shrank back trembling, expecting he would clutch her by the throat, as she had heard he had grasped a poacher whom he once caught in the wood, and when Maurice bent his head

down and seized her arm, she uttered a piteous little cry, and fell against his knees.

His hand dropped as from a snake, and, recoiling with a startled look, he said :

“Who is it? Not——”

“Yes, I—Maude Chichester,” she sobbed in an agony of emotion. “You will not hurt me. I—I found you lying on the ground—dying I thought. I knew you would be angry if I stayed, but—but, I couldn’t leave you there, lying all alone, so ill——”

His head dropped upon his bosom, and he passed his hand across his brow with a groan.

“You should not have touched me,” he said, in a low ringing voice. “I have been ill—I am seized thus sometimes. Have you been here long, senora?”

Maude started, and looking, saw that his eyes were still dim and half unconscious.

“Not long,” she murmured, tremblingly. “You are still weak; will you not lean against the tree?”

"Weak!" he said, starting and looking down at the violin, which lay near the spot on which he had fallen. "Ah! I remember, where is Tigris—I bade him guard the house—and you—how came you here?"

"I——" said Maud, then stopped.

How could she tell him that his music had drawn her thither?

With a quick look that told her he had read her thoughts he said:

"It is late. You should not be here. The brambles have torn your dress; your hands are scratched too. Come."

He turned to go.

Not one word of thanks had he uttered. She noticed it even as she turned to follow him, but thought nothing strange in the omission. All he did or left undone seemed best.

They went on a dozen yards, he brushing away and breaking down the tanglewood at each step; then he turned his head.

"You are tired" he said, with a sweet, grave

smile that lit up his features till they became transformed. "I will carry you."

She shrank back, but his outstretched arms clasped her round as if she was a new-born babe, and, giving herself up to the delight that filled her soul, she, with a sigh and the quiver of an autumn leaf, nestled against his breast, her head dropping on to his shoulder.

Silently he strode on, crushing the undergrowth beneath his tread, his hair blown now and again across her cheek, his breath fanning her bare arm ; then, when the terrace glimmered in front, he knelt down, and, with ineffable grace and tenderness, set her on the ground.

Her hand lingered round his neck with a caress, which, struggle as she might, she could not repress. Opening her lips, she breathed as one breathes when waking from a long sleep of delicious dreams.

With his keen, dark eyes fixed upon her face, and reading it as clearly as one reads an open book, he shook for one instant as he saw the

look ; then, gathering himself together with the shake of a lion, or his own dog, said, almost sternly :

“ You are safe, child. I will watch you until you enter the house. Go, and do not visit the wood at night again.”

Fixing her eyes eagerly on his face as if anxious not to lose a single word he spoke, she quailed at his harsh tone ; then, lowering her head upon her bosom, turned, and, without a word, glided across the lawn.

He stood watching her girlish figure until it had disappeared into the house.

Then, with his lips closed tightly, as if to stifle the passion at his heart, he strode back into the wood.



CHAPTER VIII.

"Courage mounteth with occasion."—SHAKESPEARE.

THAT night, or rather morning, was an eventful one to more than the strange Rector and gentle Maud.

Carlotta, white-faced and heavy-eyed, had retired to her room after seeing Lady Mildred comfortably ensconced in bed, and receiving a kiss from her ladyship's kindly lips, felt as little inclined for sleep as the sweet girl in the chamber in the Hall, but, unlike her, could not sit serenely before her mirror.

Clasping her white hands in front of her, and throwing her majestic head back till the veins stood out in little blue threads in her splendid

throat, she seemed gasping for air—for very life—while her rigid lips murmured in broken accents, that fell like icicles snapped from excess of cold.

“Too late, too late! Sold! Oh, Heaven, give me strength to bear it. Give him strength to hate me. How he looked! I shall see his eyes all the hours of the night, feel his hands, clenched and stony, beating against my heart. Yet I have kept my vow. I have done right. Right? Have I? Suppose—suppose, after all, the money, the dross, should turn to bitter apples and Dead Sea fruit? Suppose I have wrecked his and my own life for naught? No, no; I will not think of it. I know that poverty must mean misery. I know that wealth, place, rank, mean power and happiness! Happiness—oh, Chudleigh, noble Chudleigh! Will your hand never clasp mine again with the grasp of love? Will your eyes never meet mine again, save with the agony of reproach? Will you——Hush! hush! Am I an

idiot, a brainless school-girl, that I talk this balderdash? Enough, enough. I, Carlotta Lawley, penniless daughter of a penniless man—adventurer—have sworn to win rank and wealth for my mate, and I have done so. What matters the pain of the game? No battle is gained without bloodshed, no game won but some must lose,” and she sank upon the bed and lowered her head upon her hands. “Let me think. To-morrow he will be here to tell Lady Mildred; the next day and the news will be in every gossip’s mouth. I must play my part—I must! More, I will! There shall be no dishonesty. He shall have myself, my obedience, everything save my love.”

For half an hour she remained thus motionless, drowsy with the stupor of despair and an aching heart, when suddenly her acute ears detected a grating noise in the adjoining room, which served the purposes of a boudoir and safe room. In it Lady Mildred’s many, and her own few, jewels were kept.

For the moment she thought nothing of the noise and dropped her weary head into its old position, but after a slight pause it came again, this time in the form of a rattling, and, now thoroughly aroused and suspicious, she rose, and, gliding to the door, listened intently.

"Some one has broken into the house," she murmured. "Some one is trying the window!"

For a moment her heart beat with a wild terror, but the next a feeling of almost savage delight ran through her, and with tightly compressed lips and glittering eyes she plucked off her slippers, gathered her dress around her, and softly opened the door.

Pausing to let the slight sound of the creaking door die away, until she heard the unmistakable click of an opened window, the brave girl, strung up to an unnatural calm by excitement, stole along the slight strip of passage that intervened between the two rooms and reached the door of the room whence the noise came.

It was ajar. Deliberately pushing it open far

enough to admit her, she entered and saw the figure of a man, dressed in a fustian suit, with heavy boots swathed with folds of list, a ragged fur cap upon his head, and a piece of black crape covering the upper part of his face.

He was bending down before a pretty toy cabinet, trying one of the doors with a small bar of iron by the light of a dark lantern.

By his side lay a pistol—not the first Carlotta Lawley had seen by very many. It was cocked, and, as she felt assured, was loaded.

On the ledge of the open window were two grappling hooks attached to a ladder of slight rope by which the burglar had ascended.

Although it has taken some minutes to describe the position of affairs, Carlotta's keen eyes took it in in a moment, and in another had determined what to do.

Springing to the window, she unfastened the grappling irons and heard the ladder fall to the

ground, then, turning, faced the burglar, who with a fearful imprecation ground out from beneath his teeth had leapt to his muffled feet.

"On'y speak a word or screech, and I'll shoot yer, hang me if I don't," he croaked, hoarsely.

"I don't intend to," she said—"that is, at least, if I do not change my mind. You can fire if you like. The consequences are very easily told. The house would be alarmed—it is waiting now for my signal; the ladder has gone—escape would be out of the question."

Bill the burglar stared in amazement; his keen brain had taken in the sense and truth of her words at once.

Lowering his pistol, he said, huskily :

"Well, you are a cool 'un, miss," and there was a tone of admiration in his words, and a light in his eyes that made the beauty almost smile. "Pr'aps you'll tell me what you are

goin' to do?" he growled, fingering the pistol, but not offering to raise it again.

"That depends upon what you have done," said Carlotta. "Have you injured that cabinet?"

Bill stared. It was getting too hot. This woman whom he could have strangled with a clutch of his dirty hands, or shot by a curl of his strong finger, was beating him at his own game! How beautiful she looked too! He was beginning to feel ashamed of himself, and with a shake like a dog, advanced a step.

"No foolery," he croaked, "I'm not a-goin' to stand it. Get out of the way, and let me take the swag, or——" and he raised the pistol again.

Carlotta stretched out her hand, and caught the bell rope.

"Ah, you want me to ring I see," she said, feeling her courage fast ebbing away, yet all the more determined that he should not see it.

"No—no!" cried the man. I——"

"Stand back, then, and put down that pistol" said Carlotta, in a firm voice of command.

Bill hesitated for a second, then with an emphatic consignment of her eyes and limbs to a warm climate, laid the pistol on the table.

"There!"

"Now," said Carlotta, at that moment noticing a jewel box lying on the floor, with its lid torn open and sides broken in. "Now pick up that box, and put back the things you have taken from it."

Bill eyed her for a moment with sullen eyes, but a movement of the hand which held the bell rope decided him.

Slowly he picked up the box, and, unbuttoning his coat pocket, noiselessly plucked forth, as if he were plucking out his heart, the heap of glittering gems.

"Have you anything else," asked Carlotta, sternly.

"No," snarled the man.

"Very well!" rejoined Carlotta. "Now, then,

there is a five pound note ; take it and go. If it is any use to ask for anything, I'll ask you to repay me for saving you from transportation by trying—trying, mark me—an honest life ; but I'm afraid it would be waste of words and time. Take the note and go."

And she held the crisp piece of paper towards him.

The man stood stock still, and gazed at her as if he doubted his senses.

"Is it all square ?" he gasped.

"I do not understand you," said Carlotta, calmly. "If you mean am I playing you false, you know I am not ; I could have done it long ago had I wished. Take this and go ; I cannot answer for their waiting much longer."

Bill came forward and took off his cap ; it was thoughtlessly done, and he paid for his compelled reverence, for, with the cap, off tumbled the mask.

"Ah !" he cried, his disclosed face turning white. "You'll know me—you'll split upon me."

"Another word like that and I ring," said Carlotta. "I have given you my promise that you shall go unharmed, and I shall keep it."

"You're a lady, a queen, 'ang me!" cried the man, with enthusiastic admiration. "Miss, I wouldn't touch a hair of yer head; I never meant to, swelp me. Put the note away; chuck it in the fireplace; I won't touch it—Well, if yer insists upon it I will; but I swear I'll keep it as a token of this 'ere night and you, miss; and if ever you should want a friend to give you a hand in anything of 'this sort, or leastways anything rough and ready, I'm your man, swelp me. Ask for Cribby Bill, at the 'Spotted Calf,' Vitechapel, and you'll soon hear o' me. Good-bye, miss; I can manage to get down by the winder, no matter if I do break my neck; good-bye, miss, and God bless yer."

Thus saying, and without adding the authority for his belief that he had a right to command the benediction, the bullet head of Cribby Bill

disappeared beneath the ledge, and Carlotta fell in a half-swoon against the cabinet she had so bravely protected, murmuring :

“Thank God! if it had not have been for this I should have gone mad!”





CHAPTER IX.

"Gold ! yellow, glittering, precious gold !

* * * * *

What need we should have any friends if we
should never have any need of them ? "

TIMON OF ATHENS.

NEXT day two topics were flying about the county and filling the gossip-mongers with goods—the engagement of Lord Crownbrilliant and Miss Lawley, and the daring attempt at burglary at the Cottage which that lady had so bravely prevented.

These two events and the grand *fête* at the Folly set the whole district in a ferment ; nothing else was talked about, and before the evening had closed in, Lady Mildred's drawing-room was full of distinguished visitors, who had come to kill two birds with one stone—to learn

the full and latest particulars of the dramatic scene with the burglar, and to congratulate Miss Lawley upon her conquest.

Lord Crownbrilliants had very nearly fainted when Carlotta, in calm tones, had given him a concise account of the affair, and he wanted to rush off to town and offer an enormous reward for the capture of the man ; but Carlotta not only begged him to refrain from any attempts to capture Cribby Bill, but actually refused to give a description of his appearance.

"What is this about Carlotta Lawley's engagement, Chudleigh?" asked Sir Fielding, as Chudleigh entered the library with a letter in his hand.

"Who told you, sir?" replied Chudleigh, Scotch fashion, by asking another question.

"Maud," replied Sir Fielding. "She has just come back from the Cottage, and is filled with some story of a burglary, or attempt at it, that occurred there last night, and Carlotta's engagement with Lord Crownbrilliants."

"I suppose it is true then, sir," said Chudleigh, turning to the window till his face had regained something of its usual colour.

"I am delighted to know that it is," said Sir Fielding. It is a splendid match for her—splendid. Lord Crownbrilliant is just the husband for such a regal creature as Carlotta Lawley, to say nothing of the title and the broad estates."

"I came to disturb you with this letter," said Chudleigh, not able to bear more, and he laid it on the table. "It is a notice from the solicitors. Two weeks only remain."

Sir Fielding shrank back into his chair.

"Two weeks!" he repeated. "Longer than that, Chud, surely. Two weeks! What is to be done?"

Chudleigh shook his head.

"I am at a loss, sir," he said. "We can scarcely hope to raise the money, and, if not, the Hall——"

Sir Fielding held up his white hand tremblingly.

"Don't say it, Chud. Bad enough to know it, to think of it, without giving it tongue."

Chudleigh sighed, and there followed a minute's silence, Sir Fielding shrinking into his chair with his hand before his eyes.

Presently, with a suddenness that startled Chudleigh, he said:

"Chud, I'll try the Folly."

Chudleigh started and crimsoned.

"There is no other course?" he added, though interrogatively.

"I know of none," said Chudleigh.

"Then I will go," said Sir Fielding, nerving himself to a fit of energy, and rising from his chair.

"At once, sir?" said Chudleigh, with the inward longing to postpone the trial he knew it would be for his father.

"Aye, at once, Chud—at once," replied Sir Fielding, brokenly. "Delays are dangerous.

It is the last moment, or nearly so; besides, Chud, it will cost me as much to do it a week hence as it does now."

"Let me go with you, sir," said Chudleigh.

"No, no," replied Sir Fielding, though reluctantly. "I'll go alone. I don't think I could bear you to hear me asking him."

Chudleigh, when Sir Fielding had left the room, sank into the straight-backed chair beside the window, and stared moodily across the park.

Strange! the blow had fallen very lightly upon him; his poverty did not seem so bitter now. He forgot, or did not know, that despair deadens the heart and numbs the senses.

Meanwhile Sir Fielding, with bent head and a heavy hand upon his carved stick, was walking across the park, on his way to ask for a loan from the cotton spinner whose existence a few months back he had refused to recognise.

"He will think," he murmured, "that I have accepted his friendship as a lead up to this. Ah! what would I do—what would I not suffer

to have the golden years back again ! I might have worked this money out of the estate. Might ! might ! What is the use of might ? My opportunities have been spent and lost amongst the dry records of the past. Books bring comfort, they say ; they have brought ruin to me. At least, but for them I might have staved it off, and still handed down the Hall as a heritage to my children," and thinking thus, the old aristocrat bowed his head still lower to hide the tears that fell upon his white-frilled shirt.

He had reached the corner of the road that branched off to the Rectory, and, with the intention of cutting his way short by going through the Rectory Wood, had opened the gate, when the owner, followed by Tigris, the dog, strode from amongst the trees and swung it back for him.

" Ah ! good-morning !" said Sir Fielding, lifting his hat, " I am caught trespassing."

" Not trespassing, but conferring an honour,"

replied Maurice Durant, bending with his kingly bow. "The Rectory and its grounds are at your disposal, Sir Fielding."

"You are too generous," said Sir Fielding, passing through the gate, and leaning his arm against the post, for he was rather tired.

"Not more so than yourself," retorted Maurice Durant, with a grave smile. "It is not once only that you have placed the Hall at my disposal."

Sir Fielding winced.

"What I offered I meant," he said, sadly; then, moved by an uncontrollable impulse, he added, "It will not be in my power, perhaps, to continue my offer long."

At the words and the sad tone the stalwart figure started the slightest in the world, and his heavy brows lowered searchingly, as, fixing his eyes upon the pale, gentle face, he said, the foreign accent very palpable :

"What mean you?"

Sir Fielding looked up into the noble face,

and answered bitterly, after a moment's hesitation :

"I don't know why I should not tell you, Mr. Durant. I should have told your father in the years gone by. Where do you think I am going now?"

Maurice Durant, whose frown had grown darker at Sir Fielding's mention of his father, raised his brows with a shrug of his stalwart shoulders.

"I am going to the Folly," said Sir Fielding, raising his head, "to beg a loan of Mr. Gregson wherewith to pay off a mortgage on the Hall, which forecloses in a fortnight's time."

Slowly, with sad, bitter distinctness, the words fell brokenly from the thin, quivering lips, and at their close the blue eyes were filled with tears.

There was a minute's pause. When Sir Fielding looked up again, he saw a light in the dark eyes gazing down at him that he had never seen there before—a light he would not have

thought the stern, fierce eyes capable of possessing.

"To the Folly!" said the grand voice, lowered to a pitch of gentleness that corresponded with the gaze, and equally surprised Sir Fielding. "To the Folly! Why walk so far, Sir Fielding? The Rectory is much nearer."

"The Rectory!" murmured Sir Fielding.

"Ay, the Rectory," repeated Maurice Durant. "You spoke of my father, just now; he would have considered it not far from an insult to pass his house in search of a favour; what cause have you to deem me more gracious? Why should Sir Fielding be too proud to take aid from those whom he has helped in the past?"

And the dark eyes flashed now almost angrily. Sir Fielding stared bewildered.

Could it be possible that this strange being really considered his neglecting to ask him for the loan an insult?

"Or did you think the Durant coffers had been emptied by their spendthrift owner,

Maurice? If so, you were wrong, Sir Fielding ; there is gold in them still—idle gold that could find no better use and purpose than to relieve, however slightly, the wants of Chichester Hall."

As the words rang out, Sir Fielding almost lost their sense in the feeling of admiring awe that filled him, for the form raised to its great height, the head, with its flowing hair, seemed rather those of some heroic mediæval king than a rector of the nineteenth century.

For a moment he was speechless, then he stammered :

"I—I thought you were perhaps unable——"

"I forgive you ; say no more," said Maurice Durant, holding out his hand. "Though I will not say I could have done so had you reached the Folly. Come, Sir Fielding, let us walk to my den—it is indeed a den—and get this trivial business settled."

"Trivial!" repeated Sir Chichester, shaking his head. "The amount——"

"Is not over fifty thousand pounds?"

Sir Fielding smiled.

"Good, then it is small," said Maurice Durant.
"Come."

Sir Fielding walked at his side, wondering and marvelling, scarce able to persuade himself that he had not gone to sleep in the hot sunshine, and was in the land of a dream.

Opening a small side door with a key, Maurice Durant held it until Sir Fielding had passed through, and then following him, closed and bolted it.

Then together they ascended the darkened stairs, lined with dim, dust-covered faces of past and gone Durants, and glittering here and there with patches of gold carving, still unfaded.

Stopping at a door, which Sir Fielding remembered as the entrance to Gerald Durant's own room, Maurice Durant unlocked it, and, as before, held it for Sir Fielding to pass.

As he entered the baronet started. The room was furnished as it was, the furniture occupied the same places as it did, in the time

when the Rectory was the glory of the county.

Every chair was in its old place, the sunlight falling on the same cabinet, the ancient fire-irons leaning against the old brass trestles, everything in the room, small and great, as it was the night Maurice Durant's father had fallen dead across its massive table.

Maurice Durant wheeled a chair from the table, and with a "Be seated, Sir Fielding," walked to the old cabinet, and, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, unlocked one of the drawers.

Sir Fielding watched with curious anxiety, feeling half bewildered.

When the drawer was pulled out, Maurice Durant went to a cupboard, and swinging back its carved and gilded door, took from its shelves a large quaint wineflask and a glass.

"Burgundy," he said, with a curt smile ; "the only wine the Rectory owns, as you may remember, Sir Fielding. Will you drink?"

Sir Fielding bowed, and silently filled his glass—also quaintly cut and of foreign make.

“It is superb wine!” he said, “Did you find this in the cellars?”

Maurice nodded.

“Aye! An army of bottles, cobwebbed and dust-covered.”

“The wine is nearly as old as the house,” said Sir Fielding.

“And as little valued,” said Maurice Durant, with a strange smile. “I never touch it.”

Then he went back to the cabinet and lifted a bag and a small parcel from the drawer.

These he placed on the table, and unfastening, disclosed to Sir Fielding’s astonished gaze a heap of gold and notes, some on foreign, most on English, banks.

“My dear Durant!” he said. “Do you keep that enormous sum of money in that old worm-eaten cabinet?”

The owner of the treasure bowed with a sombre smile.

"But," continued Sir Fielding, "are you not afraid of burglars? By the way, an attempt was made at Lady Mildred's only last night. Nothing would be easier to our London thieves than to break into this old place and decamp with the money,"

Maurice Durant smiled again.

"Let them come," he said. "They are welcome to the money so that they do not disturb its owner. Have no fear, Sir Fielding. I have a knack of taking care of my own if I think it worth the fighting for, which, as for this dross, I do not."

"But why not bank it?" said Sir Fielding, even his little business' knowledge revolting against such a waste of capital.

"Bank it, why?" replied Maurice Durant, frowning. "That it may breed more? What do I, who live by my gun and spend nothing, want with capital or interest? Bah! Sir Fielding, you have lived too long in this old money-floated island. Had you spent the best

or worst part of your life in desert solitudes, among prairie and mountain wilds, living by your hands' strength and your brains' cunning, fighting for your daily life with wild beasts and wilder men, you would know how to scorn this glittering dust that takes its value from its place and not from its worth."

Sir Fielding bowed.

"Pardon me, Mr. Durant," he said, with earnest gravity. "Mine was a worthless anxiety—yours a noble carelessness. I, alas! am compelled to value this dust at the price my fellow-men, nay, my creditors, put upon it——"

"Nay, pardon me," broke in Maurice Durant, laying his hand upon the old man's shoulder with a grasp that was almost a caress, and had something touching in its gesture of respect. "You were right—I wrong. The dross is valuable, if only for the single reason that it is of service to you. Tell me, is there sufficient there?"

Sir Fielding, deeming it the truest generosity

to accept with little verbiage the princely offer, glanced at the notes and weighed the bag.

"More than enough, I think," he said. "I really cannot say. Chudleigh could tell."

"Then let Mr. Chichester estimate it," said Maurice Durant. "The bag is heavy; I would give you more notes but that this pile is all I possess. There is plenty more gold," he added, quickly, seeing the reluctant crossing of Sir Fielding's brow—"more than I shall ever need."

"How can I express my gratitude?" murmured Sir Fielding, the tears in his eyes.

"By not wounding me with thanks," replied the other. "I have few moments of pleasure, Sir Fielding. This is one of them. Do not mix its gold with alloy."

Sir Fielding rose, and held out his hand.

"You will not let me thank you," he said. "Then let me, in addition to taking your gold, beg of you one other favour."

Maurice Durant bowed.

"No favour you ask of me shall be refused or be called one," he replied.

"Let me call you friend!" said Sir Fielding, in a low voice broken with emotion. "Lessen this debt somewhat, or rather make its weight greater, by breaking the bonds of solitude which surround you and making the Hall your home. We have thought of you every day and spoken of you often. From now your name will spell 'saviour' to us. Be the friend in person as you are in deed, and be one of us."

Maurice Durant turned his head away for one moment as if struggling with some intense emotion, but the next he seized the bag with one hand and placing the bundle of notes in Sir Fielding's hand with the other, said, curtly, though somewhat sadly :

"The bag is heavy—I will carry it to the park. Come."

They went, Maurice Durant carefully closing each door—and locking it—as they passed through.



CHAPTER X.

"For life, noise, dust, red-hot party faction,
Give me an election's fierce distraction."

CONGREVE.

AS far as the Gregsons were concerned the Folly *fête* had answered its purpose.

Miss Lavinia had, by the aid of her blushes and reputed wealth, entirely succeeded in interesting the Marquis Lantry, who was heard to declare that she was a "deuced fine girl, and quite fit to sit at the bottom of any gentleman's table."

That, from the marquis, was wondrously refined admiration.

Miss Bella, too, had made a decided conquest of the fair-haired boy lord, who, when calling the next day, had ventured to invite her for

a ride, and during it plunged far enough into gallantry to transport the handsome and ambitious Bella to the seventh heaven.

Mr. Gregson had got himself recognised by the county, and secured—as he had hoped—a flowery description in the local papers, and Master Tom had drunk unlimited champagne, danced with Maud twice, and sold a chestnut cob—rather weak on its forelegs—to Lord Cornthwaite for double its value.

As for Mrs. Gregson, she had been hob and nob. with titled ladies to her heart's desire, and so one and all of the family were satisfied.

Of course there was a grain of bitterness in the news of Lord Crownbrilliant's engagement to Miss Lawley, which his lordship told them himself, with a great deal of stammering and much circumlocution ; but the young ladies hoped for consolation and took the news pretty amiably, gushingly assuring his lordship that Miss Lawley was a "dear girl," and that they

always did think she had a tender feeling for a certain person, whereat the certain person "he!-he-ed!" idiotically, and took his leave—the Misses Gregson, as soon as the door was banged, breaking out into a chorus of "The designing creature—I knew she'd catch him!"—quite oblivious of the fact that they had spent no little time or few pains themselves in angling for his lordship.

Mr. Gregson growled not a little the next morning when he walked round his grounds and saw the ravages the workmen and artificial grottoes had made in his flower-beds and lawn, and grumbled a great deal when he wrote the "small" cheque which was to satisfy the army of upholsterers, musicians, actors, and others who had helped to make "the confounded nonsense" a success.

"Don't ask me to make an idiot of myself another time," he growled, while at dinner. "I've been caught once: don't expect me to do it again."

"But the girls, my dear," remarked Mrs. Gregson, meekly.

Whereupon Mr. Gregson confounded the girls, and declared that if they couldn't catch their grand fish without so much golden bait they might go without them.

In the evening of the second day after the *fête* Mr. Tom Gregson burst into the drawing-room with the intelligence that Mr. Townley, the Member for Annsleigh, had just died.

"Eh? What?" exclaimed Mr. Gregson. "Where did you hear it from?" asked his father.

"Stopped a messenger rushing up to the Hall with it," replied Tom, rather surlily, not relishing the suspicious tone of his father's question.

"There will be pretty doings now," he added. "The seat's vacant."

"Of course it is," snapped Mr. Gregson. "You don't suppose a dead man can fill it?"

Here, Thomas," shouting to a servant, "put the cob in the dog-cart, and tell James I want him to drive me to the station."

"What for, papa?" said Miss Lavinia.

"To telegraph," replied Mr. Gregson, hurrying from the room.

"I could have told the governor that the news was already telegraphed," said Mr. Tom, with a grin, "but he'd have directly asked me how I knew."

Mr. Tom Gregson was quite right; the news had already been telegraphed to the head of the Government and the leader of the Opposition, and both were already forming their plans for getting the vacant seat.

"We must have a Liberal in," said Lord Foley, the Liberal whip, to the premier. "Shall we send Harber down? He wants a seat, and we owe him something; or get Gregson, the Manchester man, to stand?"

"Much influence?" asked the Liberal chief, curtly.

"Well, pretty fair. He has more, of course, than a stranger would have."

"Better write, or send Parker, the agent, down, then," said the premier.

Almost at the same moment a conference was going on between the leader of the Opposition and his *confrères*.

"We must not lose the seat," said he, shaking his head; they have too large a majority as it is. Who is there to send down?"

Several were mentioned as eligible candidates—of course all staunch Tories—but Mr. Chester, the leader, shook his head.

"No, no—won't do. Let me see. Sir Fielding Chichester is the man for the place; very popular, eh? Write and ask him to put up for it."

"Too old," suggested the Tory whip.

"Y-es, that's true," answered his leader.

"Let me see," a favourite expression of the honourable gentleman. "Hasn't he a son, a Mr. Charles or Chudleigh Chichester?"

"Chudleigh."

"I thought so. Name him. Explain the situation, and declare that it calls for him."

So that it came to pass that the morning express carried two parliamentary agents down to Grassmere: one to Sir Fielding Chichester from the Tory side, asking him to put forward his son, and one to William Gregson, Esq., of the Folly, Grassmere, to request him to stand for the Liberal interest.

"Chudleigh," said Sir Fielding, "read that."

Chudleigh read and returned the letter, looking neither delighted nor surprised.

It needed more than an offer of a chance for the seat of Annsleigh to dispel the gloom of his spirits.

"Well?" said Sir Fielding, whose cheeks were flushed, and who was looking particularly well and happy.

"Well, sir," said Chudleigh, "what do you wish me to do?"

"I—I don't know," said Sir Fielding. "It

is a great honour, some would say a great piece of luck—the second this week, dear Chud,” he added, significantly, glancing at the ornamental iron safe which held the wherewithal to clear off the Hall mortgage.

Chudleigh flushed.

“You wish me to stand, sir?”

“I think so,” said Sir Fielding, hesitating, his usual irresolute look wrinkling his forehead.

“What do you say, Maud?”

“Ah, let us ask Maudie,” said Chudleigh, laying his hand upon her arm.

“You haven’t told me yet what the honour is you seem to hesitate so in accepting,” said Maud, with her sweet smile, returning Chudleigh’s caress by stroking his hand.

“Mr. Chester, or rather the Tory whip, has written to ask Chudleigh to stand for Annsleigh,” said Sir Fielding.

“A member of parliament!” said Maud, jumping, woman-like, to the conclusion that no one could do anything else but vote for her brother.

"Not quite," said Chudleigh. "I may not be returned, supposing I stand for it."

"Ah, hem, yes," said Sir Fielding, meditatively, thinking, though he did not like to say so, that the heir to Chichester Hall stood a good chance. "Dear me, dear me," he continued, "to think that Townley, whom I knew at Eton, poring over his Virgil, should be lying dead, and my son asked to take his place—not over Virgil—but in the House! It reminds me that I cannot be far from that last parliament——"

"Papa," exclaimed Maud, the tears springing to her eyes, while Chudleigh said :

"You are many years younger than Mr. Townley, sir."

"A few, a few," murmured Sir Fielding. "I remember—— But about the seat, Chud——about the seat. What will you do?"

"Whatever you choose, sir," said Chudleigh, indifferently and dutifully.

"But I don't choose—I never can," said Sir

Fielding, getting worried. "I should like to see you in Parliament."

"Then get in, dear Chud," whispered Maud, and Chudleigh, rising, said, with an air of decision :

"Then I think I will stand, sir ; what time does the letter say Mr. Jones, the agent, may be expected ?"

"By the—the—— Look, Maud, my dear ; my eyes——"

"The express, Chud," said Maud.

"I will send the brougham for him," said Chudleigh, and left the room to make the first move in the game which he and Mr. Gregson were to play.

* * * * *

Directly Mr. Jones had received Chudleigh's affirmative reply to the letter asking him to stand for Annsleigh, he requisitioned a light dog-cart and a couple of the fastest hacks, one to use and the other to be kept ready, and drove off at a breakneck pace for the

printers, the result of which visit appeared in the evening in the shape of a thousand yellow placards posted through Grassmere, Annsleigh, and Warrington, setting forth Mr. Chudleigh Chichester's parliamentary address, and requesting the votes of the loyal and independent voters of the borough.

No sooner were the yellow bills displayed than they were covered by larger and more flaming placards of a cerulean hue, containing Mr. Gregson's address to the free and independent voters, and before ten o'clock yet another bill, this time of a brilliant crimson, was flashing from every available spot, declaring that Gideon Giles, the labourer's friend, offered himself as the working-man's Republican candidate to the free, independent and patriotic voters.

Sir Fielding Chichester, when the news of the two rivalships was brought to him, was first astounded, then enraged—more enraged than he had ever been in his life before.

"What!" he said, his mild voice raised to a high pitch of indignation. "Mr. Gregson, the Government candidate, is it possible! and—and Gideon?—what did you say the fellow's name was, Mr. Jones?—Giles? Gideon Giles, a Radical—Red Republican—! Chudleigh, it's an insult. You must win; you shall if it ruin me. I will show them that a Tory can be patriotic, and ruin himself to prevent a Radical or a Liberal gaining a seat he has proclaimed for!"

"My dear Sir Fielding," exclaimed Mr. Jones, in an ecstasy. "If you will only talk like that on the hustings the seat is ours. Glorious!"

Chudleigh only smiled.

Sir Fielding paced the library, book in hand.

"Where is Maud?" he said.

"In her room with her maid, giving instructions for the making of several thousand rosettes and streamers," said Chudleigh, wearily.

"Tell—yes, tell her I want her," said Sir Fielding.

Chudleigh went up the huge staircase and returned with Maud, who looked surprised at the sight of the angry expression on her father's usually placid face.

"Do you want me, papa?" she said.

"Yes, Maud," he replied. "Here have these Gregson people abused our—our kindness, by opposing Chudleigh's election! Mr. Gregson has put up for the borough."

"Oh, papa!" said Maud, sorrowfully, foreseeing what was going to happen.

"It is astounding," said Sir Fielding. "Of course, Maudie, from this time you must have nothing to say to them. I will not brook such an insult."

"But, papa—" murmured Maud, her gentle spirit reluctant to obey.

"There, there; go and make your ribbons, my darling, and mind what I say. We must not recognise these Gregsons from to-night."

Maud went away sorrowfully, already regretting that she had helped to influence Chud-

leigh in accepting the Tory offer, and finding half her pleasure in constructing yellow rosettes vanished.

Meanwhile confusion and excitement reigned rampant in the Gregson household.

The head thereof was storming away in his study with Mr. Parker, the agent, and a select committee of the more respectable portion of Warrington, and the Liberals of Annsleigh and Grassmere.

The drawing-room was filled with blue ribbon and blue banners and flags. In the stables the carriages were being decorated with the same colours, and all about the hall lay scattered broadsides and placards.

The girls were half pleased, half doubtful—indeed, the latter feeling predominated, and, backed by their brother, they had ventured upon a remonstrance with their father, but he had quickly silenced them with a curt request that they would mind their own businesses.

Tom was troubled, for he guessed that Sir

Fielding would be annoyed at his father's opposition to Chudleigh, and dreaded that the family communications between Folly and Hall would be cut off.

And rather than lose his talks and walks with Maud, whom he loved to desperation, poor Tom would have been delighted for his father to lose a hundred seats, therefore he anathematised the whole business, and returned to the stables with his hands thrust into the depths of his tight pockets and an emphatic declaration, in reply to a request from his father that he would join the committee, that he would have nothing to do with the stupid affair.

On the morrow Sir Fielding drove Maud and Chudleigh through the village and Annsleigh with yellow rosettes on their horses' heads and a yellow streamer at the mens' button-holes.

Mr. Jones had already dashed away in the dog-cart to form the committee, and had begged Sir Fielding to "show himself."

"Where are we going, papa?" asked Maud,

when they had reached the end of Annsleigh, and had bowed to a volley of cheering from a group of Tories assembled at the "King's Head," the "Yellow" house.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Sir Fielding, with rather a bewildered air.

"Let us go to Aunt Mildred's," said Maud. "Do, papa; see, here is quite a crowd of people coming," and she flushed with nervous agitation.

"Very well," said Sir Fielding, bowing to the cheering and cries of "Mr. Chichester for ever." "Up with the Yellow and down with the Blue." "Very well."

"Drop me here, sir," said Chudleigh, flushing slightly. "I promised to meet Mr. Jones and the committee."

And he leapt to the ground.

Sir Fielding turned the horses' heads in the direction of the Cottage.

No sooner had he done so than Mr. Gregson's heavily plated barouche dashed up, and the

occupants, Mr. Gregson and the two girls, bowed and smiled.

Sir Fielding's face grew stern and proud, and Maud's crimsoned. Neither acknowledged the salute of the Gregsons.

Mr. Gregson flushed angrily.

"Ah!" he said. "Sir Fielding's going to play the 'igh and 'aughty. Just like a Tory. Well, I'll show him I can beat 'em at their own game."

And he leant back in the gaudy equipage with the air of an emperor.

The "Blue Goat" was the Liberal headquarters. There a large crowd of free-and-independents had collected to welcome their wealthy candidate.

Farther on, at the "Pig and Whistle," in Warrington, a mob of factory hands and roughs were yelling round a short, thick-set cobbler, Mr. Gideon Giles, who was assuring them that liberty, equality and fraternity were the key words of human happiness, and that a working-

man's Republic was the only thing to save England from slavery and ruin.

Mr. Gideon Giles's oratory was fervid and somewhat roughly eloquent, but not altogether lucid.

Sir Fielding, on arriving at Lady Mildred's, found Lord Crownbrilliant seated in the drawing-room with Carlotta, and was greeted by his lordship with a delicate shake of the hand and the assurance that the Tawies would be sure to win.

"You are on Mr. Chichester's committee, are you not?" said Carlotta, turning her face as she spoke toward Maud.

"Eh? N-no—I'm not," said Lord Crownbrilliant, fixing his eyes with an anxious glance at the averted face as if longing to discover if his beautiful mistress wished him to be.

"Oh," said Carlotta, raising her eyebrows. "I thought you were."

"Not y-yet," said Lord Crownbrilliant,

reading her look rightly. "But I'm going to be if Mr. Chi-Chichester will have me! He! he!"

"Only too honoured, my lord," said Sir Fielding, bowing. "I will lose no time in informing Chudleigh of your kindness."

"Dear Chudleigh will have to fight very hard, so they tell me," said Maud to Carlotta.

"Will he?" asked Carlotta, eagerly. "Is there any possibility of his losing?"

"Oh, great," said Maud. "The Liberals are very strong—at least, I think I heard papa say so. I'm afraid to speak, for I do not understand it one half, and the Radicals—Mr. Gideon Giles's party, you know—are not at all to be laughed at."

Carlotta's eyes, which had been lowered while Maud had been speaking, raised themselves with a sudden flash that surprised her gentle companion.

"He must win!" she murmured.

"He will if all his friends help him, he says," said Maud. "Ah, here is aunt."

The story had to be given over again.

"What can I do?" said Lady Mildred, all on fire. "Can I go and get votes, or what——"

Sir Fielding smiled.

"I don't know."

Carlotta from her nook on the sofa said, with a tone of well-bred interest :

"Might we not drive into the town with the yellow colours, Sir Fielding?"

"The very thing!" he exclaimed. "How thoughtful you are, my dear Carlotta. I'll order the carriage at once, and tell Walker to make some rosettes."

Carlotta rose with a well-assumed air of languor.

"I thought you would like her to make some," she said, "so I told her to do so. I have made a few myself."

"First wate!" exclaimed Lord Crownbrilliant. "Come along, Sir Fielding; we'll put

some on my cawiage. By Jove! I'll have
evewy c-cart in the neighbourhood decowated!"

* * * * *

"Papa, I cannot understand Carlotta," said
Maud, thoughtfully, as they drove off.

"Nor I," said Sir Fielding. "She is a strange
girl — most mysterious — but she has set her
heart on Chudleigh's winning. I can see
that."





CHAPTER XI.

"Coming events cast their shadows before."—CAMPBELL.

EACH day the excitement grew more intense, the streets were thronged with Yellows, Reds, and Blues playing most awful bands and shouting with terrific discordance. Occasionally there would be a collision and a general scrimmage, which added something to the interest, and hurt very few if any one.

Chudleigh's party, composed of the *crème de la crème* of the neighbourhood, grew steadily, but Mr. Gregson's grew also, and the roughs, as the Tories called Mr. Gideon Giles's party, did not decrease.

Every evening the "Pig and Whistle" was crammed with dirty-looking men and burly

operatives, who listened with upturned, grimy faces to the oratory of their candidate or his backers.

Mr. Gideon Giles on the platform was an opponent not altogether to be despised, as Chudleigh knew, although Sir Fielding treated him and his pretensions to the seat with well-bred scorn.

"They tell me that he speaks remarkably well—at least, with tremendous force," said Chudleigh one day in committee. "I should like to hear him exceedingly."

Mr. Howard laughed.

"Would you?" he said; "so should I. It would be awfully amusing."

"And disgusting," said Sir Fielding, mildly.

"Yes—and disgusting, I daresay," said Lord Cornthwaite.

"I tell you what would be a good idea," exclaimed Mr. Jones. "Get one of his speeches reported, with false 'h's' and notes of ridicule at the end of the sentences, in the *Yellow*

Banner. We could copy it and circulate it amongst the Liberals. They're rather taken with the Red principles, but cannot stand ridicule."

"Good," said Chudleigh. "That is if he uses improper h's and says anything ridiculous."

"Oh, does he not?" said Mr. Jones, sarcastically. "Go and hear him, Mr. Chichester."

"I will," said Chudleigh.

"And I'll go with you," said Mr. Howard.

So it was arranged that the two, muffled up in workmen's jackets, should penetrate the enemy's camp.

Of course there was a good deal of opposition to the resolution, or "rash freak," from some of the committee, but Chudleigh's "I will," unlike Sir Fielding's, could never be turned into "I won't."

"Have you heard that Lantry and young Lord Goldburn have joined Gregson's committee?" said Mr. Jones.

"Yes," said Sir Fielding. "I am surprised."

"The young ladies have done it," sighed the parliamentary agent. "Women win elections."

The room at the "Pig and Whistle" was crammed as usual when Chudleigh and the Honourable Mr. Howard, clad in workmen's garb, pushed their way into it, and Mr. Gideon Giles was on his feet.

"Fellow workmen," commenced the Republican candidate, hoisting one large red hand above his greasy shock head, "I will not detain you many minutes to-night, and only rise to ask you to keep united in the great struggle that is going on between the noble working man and the bloated aristocrat. Unity is strength, my brothers, and only by standing together shall we crush the head of the snake that has so long ground the working man beneath his heel! Remember your many wrongs and your rights. Stand out against the first and stick to it for the last. The aristocrats have too long crushed the glorious working man beneath their bloated institutions. We don't want institutions—we want liberty.

We don't want a monarch who sucks our blood and deprives our children of bread to support a hindolent man's hoffspring on the proceeds of the working man's honest sweat. We don't want a corrupt court and an hoverweening royalty to spend our money and tax our labour. We don't want an heffete government to play fair into the hands of a dissolute aristocracy and false to the interests of the working man. Don't believe in promises, my brethren. Promises ain't a reduction of the taxes; ain't a cheap loaf; ain't protection for the working classes. Promises are only misleading us all on the road leadin' to rooin!"

Here the speaker stopped to wipe the perspiration from his face, which certainly deserved the epithet which he had hurled at the aristocrats so freely, and, tugging at his greasy stock, rolled off again:

"Brethren, as I said before, unity is strength. Go together to the poll—go, taking 'liberty! equality! fraternity!' for your war-cry, and

establish the holy and noble Republic! England is fast rushing down to the habyss of ruin! Britons are gradually becoming slaves! Will you be dashed on the rocks of political destruction? Will you be slaves? No, a thousand times no! Cry it with the tongue of the harkhangel Gabriel—no! no!”

The crowd, catching at the cry, shouted with stentorian lungs, “No! no!” and some one yelling out, “Liberty! Fraternity! Equality!” the men gave that too.

Chudleigh was all aflame. A born aristocrat, he could afford to treat the balderdash flung at his order with smiling contempt; but when the oily-headed speaker commenced to attack the Throne his blood was up, and, looking round at the brawny, honest, simple faces in the dense Throng, he felt a strange longing to shout out a plain denial to the stuff the man had been ranting, and point out to the honest part of the listeners the humbug of the whole speech.

So great became the longing that he found it irresistible ; and, whispering to the Honourable Howard to keep quiet, he pushed his way vigorously through the throng, and before any one could prevent him leapt upon the platform.

The hum and buzz of the voices ceased at once, and the faces upturned questioningly, while several voices shouted out :

“Who is it ?”

“A friend !” cried Chudleigh, raising his hand to command silence. “A friend too true to stand still and hear his fellow-men—his brothers—imposed upon. Gentlemen”—the word told upon them, and stilled the murmur of rage that was rising—“gentlemen, I claim your indulgence for one minute. I, with you, have listened to Mr. Gideon Giles’s speech, and listened attentively, and I declare his assertions to be false and his politics humbug. He is no friend to the working-man who would advise him to exchange good for bad, or ill for worse. That is what Mr. Giles wishes you to do.

There was a time when the man who dared throw mud at Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen—a good Queen, gentlemen, whom I believe all of you in your secret hearts reverence and respect—I say there was a time when a man reviling the Queen as Mr. Gideon Giles has done would have had his vile mud thrust down his throat—aye, and by working-men too. But things are altered, and for the worse, when working-men, honest and true, turn their voices—not their hearts, mind you—against their Queen and the State which has cherished, raised, and protected them, at the beck and call of a fellow who by his very speech proves himself neither an honest nor a working-man.”

Here loud and fierce yells broke upon the air, poured from the throats of the roughs who composed Mr. Giles’s committee, and the disreputable portion of the crowd, which, we are sorry to say, were greatly in the majority.

But Chudleigh, not a whit discouraged, raised his hand, and, shouting now, continued :

" You know whether I am speaking the truth or speaking falsely. Look back upon the past history of labour ; compare wages, time, and the laws framed for the special benefit of the working-man by the very aristocrats you have heard maligned, and tell me if there is one of you who will vote for the man that declares England a ruin and the working-man a slave."

Here the uproar became so intense—what with the yelling and shouting and the cheering and "Go on"-ing—that Chudleigh was compelled to stop, and the next instant a dozen of Mr. Giles's lambs, headed by that gentleman himself, leaped upon the platform.

"Working-men ! working-men !" yelled the republican, "a traitor is in the camp ! This is Mr. Chudleigh Chichester, the bloated aristocrats' candidate !"

"Down with him! A traitor! Down with him!" yelled the roughs, and a rush was made upon Chudleigh, who, flinging off his jacket, jumped upon a chair and tried to make himself heard.

Finding it in vain, he next seized the chair in his strong hands, and, looking as if he meant it, declared he would knock the first man down who came within reach.

There was a pause. Another form, Mr. Howard's, placed itself beside Chudleigh. Then came the final rush. Both were knocked to the ground, and would have been crushed to death, with a Babel of sound ringing in their ears, but at the moment they gave way a tremendous figure burst through the murderous mass, mowing its way with the stock-end of a heavy gun, and, like a giant, breaking down all before it, cleared a space for the two gasping men; then, crying with a stentorian shout, "Follow me!" forced a passage into the open air, leaving the men knocked about and power-

less to avenge from the very rapidity of the feat.

"Mr. Durant," said Chudleigh, wiping the blood from his battered lips as the three leapt into a dog-cart waiting in the road, "we owe you our lives."





CHAPTER XII.

"Tell truth, and shame the devil."—SHAKESPEARE.

CHUDLEIGH'S beating went far towards winning him the election, for the higher-class Liberals, led by the ladies, declared that a man who possessed so much bravery, and could talk so loyally, couldn't do much harm in the House, though a Tory, and gave him their votes; while the respectable working-men—unfortunately only few in number—who had been present and witnessed the *mêlée*, deserted the roughs and declared on his side.

Chudleigh, although badly bruised and cut about the face, was not hurt enough to keep within doors, and the next morning, rising at his usual hour, walked towards his head-quarters.

At the end of the lane leading to the Cottage he came full upon Carlotta Lawley, who was just starting for her ante-breakfast walk.

She started and turned pale as she looked up and saw his scarred face, and, stretching out her hand, breathed, rather faintly :

“Mr. Chudleigh !”

“Are you well, Miss Lawley ?” he replied, in a grave voice, which he managed to keep steady, although his heart beat madly.

“Yes, quite, thank you. But you—have they hurt you much ?”

His heart beat still faster at the anxious tremor in her voice, but he replied, with a careless smile :

“Oh, very little. Their hands are not particularly soft, but they had not time to get at us thoroughly.”

“Had not time ?” she repeated, her dark eyes fixed upon his face with the hunger and the compassion of love.

“No,” he said. “Have you not heard ? We

should have been dead men for a certainty had it not been for Mr. Durant. He came to the rescue at the right moment, and beat a way out for us with his gun like a Samson. He saved our lives without doubt," he added, warmly.

"He is a remarkable man," she murmured, her face grown pale and her bosom heaving at the idea of the terrible danger.

"He is more than that; he is a hero," said Chudleigh, earnestly.

Then there followed a moment's silence, both standing and looking at the dusty road.

Presently Chudleigh said :

"I have to thank you for a score of votes, not to speak of a larger number that cannot be plainly traced to you."

"You are quite welcome," she said, regaining her composure, but not venturing to look up. "I hope you will——"

"Why?" he said, so sharply that the blood rushed to her face. It was pale again when

she answered in a calm, earnest voice that had something of entreaty in it :

" Because a member of Parliament finds plenty to do, and hard work and something to think of are—good for you."

" I understand," he replied, catching at her meaning.

" Good-morning," she said, holding out her hand again with a smile that ill masked the pain at her heart. I shall hear you speak on the hustings directly."

He uncovered, took her hand, and the next moment she had gone.

He stood for a few seconds looking after her, then muttering : " If she were mine ! if she were mine !" strode on towards the hustings.

Amidst the confusion and clamour, the yelling and shouting, the ballad-singing and speechifying, the egg-throwing and cheering, the flaunting of blue, crimson, and yellow ribbons, and such a pandemonium of sounds as only an election can produce, Chudleigh Chichester was

proclaimed at the head of the poll, and duly elected member for the borough.

His speech had been a great and winning success. Mr. Gregson's rampant Liberalism and Mr. Gideon Giles's florid invective had fallen to dust and ashes beneath Chudleigh's outspoken determination to uphold the British throne and constitution, and when as a climax he declared that he meant to be the working man's friend by voting for the reduction of taxes and the labour time, he was answered from the dense throng by a roaring cheer that made Mr. Jones rub his hands and whisper to Sir Fielding :

"There go at least a score of votes."

Yes, Chudleigh Chichester was a member of parliament, had defeated gloriously two powerful opponents, won renown by an act of bravery, and gladdened his father's pride ; yet as he stood up in the carriage which a hundred brawny men wheeled along, bowing with uncovered head, the victor of the day, his heart was

heavy as it repeated the wistful cry of the morning :

“ If she were only mine ! if she were mine ! ”

Chudleigh's election necessitated his residence in town ; accordingly, a week after he had been returned Sir Fielding gave a grand political dinner, a complete gathering of the Tories, who feasted, drank, and toasted to the honour of Chudleigh, and made the Hall ring again with their well-bred cheers.

In the midst of the confusion of triumph and victory, Maud reigned like a gentle queen, delighted at her brother's success, yet regretting the loss of the Gregsons' acquaintance, for Sir Fielding had repeated his command that she should not hold any intercourse with them, and consequently she was compelled to pass them in her walks or drives as if she had never known them.

The parting between the brother and sister was characteristic.

“ Chud, dear Chud ; you will come down to

Grassmere often—as often as you possibly can,” she murmured ; “it will seem so lonely without you.”

“Yes, Maudie, rely upon that,” he replied, kissing her fair forehead. “It is not all play, and I shall be glad of a rest. Take care of Sir Fielding, and, Maud, have you seen Carlotta lately?”

“No,” said Maud, looking up into his face. “No. She never comes to the Hall, you know, Chud. Did you not see her when you were at Aunt Mildred’s, yesterday?”

Chudleigh shook his head.

“Chud?” she said, anxiously.

“Well?” he said, avoiding her eyes.

“Oh, Chud, tell me,” she said, sorrowfully, “you will forget her.”

His face darkened.

“You don’t know what love is, Maudie,” he said, darkly.

“Do I not?” she murmured as her face grew pale and her eyes lit up.

But he did not hear her, and with another kiss leapt into the dog-cart.

On the road to the station he passed the stalwart figure of Maurice Durant leaning against the old gate, dressed as usual, in his rough shooting clothes, and carrying the gun with which he had saved Chudleigh's life.

Chudleigh told the groom to pull up, and, jumping down, ran back.

"I am going to town," he said, "and am delighted to have an opportunity of telling you how grateful I feel for your heroic rescue. It is the second time you have saved me and mine," he said, significantly. "First my heritage and then my life."

Maurice Durant grasped his hand with a stern, sad smile.

"You make too much of very light matters, Mr. Chichester," he said. "I am anxious to forget them if you will allow me. So you are going up to London to play the great game of politics. I fear me you will not find it worth the candle."

Chudleigh smiled rather sadly.

"Is any game worth the candle?" he said.

"None!" replied Maurice Durant, sternly. "If there be I have never found it, and there are few games, Mr. Chichester, this hand has not played," and he held out his long, sinewy hand with a gesture of disdain. "But life is a lesson. You are but in the alphabet of the language of experience. Learn more, and agree with me."

"Good-bye," said Chudleigh, with a tone of respect he could not help.

"And good speed!" said Maurice Durant, shaking his hand with a flash of his rare, gentle smile, and he had turned even before Chudleigh and was lost in the wood.

Once more the dog-cart was doomed to halt upon its way, this time stopped by the soft glimmer of a muslin dress that shone through the railings of the Cottage garden gate.

Chudleigh at first determined to raise his hat and go on his way, but a man's heart is stronger than his pique, and he found himself standing beside the gate almost before he knew it.

"London!" repeated Carlotta as her hand lay in his for a moment. "I did not think you were going so soon."

"I go by the next train," he said, "and have only two minutes to spare."

"Do not let me keep you," she said, with a tremor in her voice.

His lips, still marked with the election affray, bent down to her ear.

"Carlotta, will you not say one kind word, even if it be the last?"

"I wish you every happiness," she faltered, grasping the gate with trembling hands.

He shook his head.

"Something less vain," he said, bitterly. "Rather wish me forgetfulness."

"I do," she said, still more faintly, raising her eyes to his face.

"And I do not."

And so they parted, never to meet as Carlotta Lawley and Chudleigh Chichester again.





CHAPTER XIII.

"A victory is twice itself when the achiever
Brings home full numbers." SHAKSPEARE.

LORD CROWNBRIILLIANTS with a lover's proverbial haste had no sooner succeeded in purchasing the Retreat, than he wanted to be married.

Carlotta at first positively refused to bestow herself upon him before the end of the year, but, backed up by Lady Mildred, his lordship eventually worried his beautiful betrothed into becoming Lady Crownbrilliant before the end of the summer.

So one fine morning, early in August, the little church at Grassmere was crammed with a fashionable company, and Lord Crownbril-

liants, exquisitely adorned in blue broadcloth and fawn doeskin, led Carlotta Lawley, daughter of the Captain Lawley of doubtful antecedents, to the altar.

The happy bridegroom had wished to make a grand affair of the ceremony, but Carlotta had stipulated that if she gave way as regarded time, he must bend to her wish in the matter of privacy, so the marriage was celebrated in the quietest manner possible to Lord Crownbrilliant's rank and position, and the happy pair started for the Continent cheered by a very select but small number of guests.

Pale and unnaturally calm, Carlotta had gone through the ceremony with astonishing self-possession — rather shocking the half-dozen young peeresses who acted as bridesmaids, they evidently considering sobs and tears a legitimate part of the bride's *rôle*.

But Carlotta did not cry, neither did she smile, carrying her magnificent head with a stately coldness that silenced all remarks con-

cerning her past life and want of rank, and setting everybody thinking how well she would bear the title that in a few minutes would be her due.

Some noticed that her eyes, though proud and almost defiant, were rather dim ; and one young lady very acutely remarked that the countess had had "her cry" over-night, little guessing of the fearful agony which had rent the beautiful bride's soul, and had ended in a heart-relieving torrent of tears the night before the irrevocable step was taken.

Sir Fielding and Maud were there of course—the latter had refused, with all gentleness but great firmness, to act as bridesmaid—and Chudleigh Chichester had been asked, but in a polite note he had pleaded parliamentary business as an excuse.

As no one could possibly penetrate the double door of his chambers, it cannot be known if he, like the bride, gave way to his pain ; but his friends, and he had many already,

accused him of asceticism the following morning and twitted him with his lack of spirits.

Carlotta had half dreaded he might, prompted by some indefinable jealousy, have been present at the sacrifice, and she was more than thankful when his note of refusal arrived, for, strong as she was in mind and body, she could not have answered for her strength if his eyes had been fixed on her while she forswore and perjured herself before that Most Awful and Just of all judges.

One other witness there had been besides the throng of invited guests, and that an unseen one.

Maurice Durant had passed the open church door in the middle of the service, and, with darkened brow and moody eyes, had paused, leaning on his gun, for one minute, to take a glance at the bright-coloured group, and listen to the solemn adjuration of the bishop, who had come down to marry his friend Lord Crownbrilliants.

Italy her ladyship had chosen as the place for the honeymoon to shine on, and accordingly a special steamer had been chartered to convey them across the Channel.

After Carlotta's marriage Lady Mildred had closed the Cottage and taken refuge in the Hall.

This for two reasons.

The first because she really loved the fatherless girl and missed her companionship ; and the second because Sir Fielding had suddenly come to the conclusion that his gentle Maud needed some loving woman friend beside her.

For Maud grew pale and thin, lost much of her old light-hearted sprightliness, and acquired a dreamy expression on her beautiful face and in her lovely eyes, and was too fond of solitude for so young a girl.

Sir Fielding began to think that she missed Chudleigh, whom she loved with a love that even sisters seldom feel for their brothers, and a sister's love even at its ordinary standard is a great and wonderful thing.

"We will go up to town, to dear old Chud, Maudie," Sir Fielding had said, drawing her towards him one day as she came to him in the library. "You are looking pale and poorly; do you miss him much, my darling?"

For a moment a bright flush belied his words, but the next instant her face was pale again as she answered:

"I miss Chud, of course, papa, but not enough to make me unwell. I am not ill, really—not ill at all—only weak and—oh! a mere nothing, dear, dear papa."

"How long have you felt weak and low-spirited, my darling?" Sir Fielding had asked, and Maud had coloured afresh, lowering her lovely, wistful eyes and flinging her arms round his neck.

"I—I—don't know," she whispered.

But she did, for her thoughts even as she spoke went back to the night when, in search of her diamond cross, she had seen the kingly form of Maurice Durant stretched dead-like

amongst the tall, bedewed grass, and been held in his strong, gentle arms.

Ah, that night! its memory thrilled through her pure, innocent heart; she could feel even now the kindly, pitying pressure of the strong, tender hands, hear now the subtle music of the grand, heroic voice.

"Well, well, my darling, Aunt Mildred shall come and stay with us a little while; for I also am getting moped, and miss dear Chud, and then if neither of us improve we will go to London, and try a little impure air and Chud."

So Lady Mildred came to stay at the Hall, and Maud was under strict, loving watch—a surveillance that, however tender, brought some sorrow, for she knew that she never more could, even by chance, meet the being who filled her heart, and was gradually absorbing her whole existence.

The summer passed, and found neither Maud's colour improved nor Sir Fielding's spirits light-

ened, and the anxious father decided to pass the winter in town.

"Chudleigh will be down for a few weeks directly," he said to Lady Mildred; "we will wait till he is obliged to go back and then return with him. Of course you will come and look after Maud."

"I think a season in town—especially the winter—will do her good," said Lady Mildred. "I believe she wants a little change and a little gaiety. A few balls and one or two plays will do more good than all the physic in the world."

"By the way," continued her ladyship, who delivered this opinion on her return from a walk, "have you heard that the Gregsons intend selling the Folly?"

"No!" exclaimed Sir Fielding, looking up from his book. "Can it be true?"

"Oh, quite," said Lady Mildred. "I got it from young Parsons, the solicitor. He has instructions for the sale."

"I am not surprised at it," said Sir Fielding.

"Nor I," said Lady Mildred. "Although I am rather 'sorry. It was a great pity they could not keep their place; they were getting on so nicely too! That election ruined them, for of course no one would recognise them after you had relinquished their acquaintance."

"What could I do?" said Sir Fielding, really regretting the affair. "Could I be hail fellow well met with a man who plastered his bills over those of my son? Besides——" getting warm at the recollection, "it was a piece of impertinence."

"Well, well," said Lady Mildred, soothingly. "It was very unwise to visit them at all. It was Lord Crownbrilliants' doings. At any rate the two girls have made hits. The eldest is engaged to the Marquis of Lantry, I hear."

"Can it be possible?—dear me, dear me!" said Sir Fielding. "I remember him, and—ahem!"

"Yes, he is a very naughty man, a very bad man indeed," said Lady Mildred, with

a sigh ; "but what's to be done? Men will be men."

"Yes, but there's no necessity for them to become blackguards," muttered Sir Fielding, meekly.

"Well, well," said Lady Mildred—a favourite ejaculation when her argument lost ground. "Miss Lavinia is engaged to him, and Bella very nearly to that boy, Lord—dear me, what's his name?"

"I don't remember," said Sir Fielding, taking up his book, and Lady Mildred, accepting the hint, retired.

Lady Mildred's news was perfectly correct in every item. The Gregsons were compelled to retreat; with the election they lost all the titled acquaintances Lord Crownbrilliant and Sir Fielding's influence had procured them. Mr. Gregson discovered that his design in building the enormous Folly, living in the style of a sovereign and giving princely entertainments, had fallen through from excess of ambition,

and, therefore, wounded in temper and maddened by the "d——d insolence of the aristocrats," as he termed it, he determined to leave Grassmere, sell the Folly, and remove his pomposity and new-gotten wealth to pastures new.

It was some consolation to the girls that they had so far been successful in the snaring of two titled admirers, but to Tom the quittal of Grassmere was a severe blow, for he was still madly in love with Maud—though hopelessly he felt assured—and knew he could never be happy anywhere else.

"I'm not so sure that I shall leave Grassmere," he said, when his despotic parent's determination was communicated to him. "I shall go and live at the Inn—or take a small house somewhere in the neighbourhood."

"Oh, you will, will you?" roared his father. "Then you'll pay your own bills and rent, sir, let me tell you."

Which of course settled the matter, and Tom was obliged to decamp with the family, who

left the Folly as they had arrived, in the full pomp of plated carriages and gaudy liveries, "retiring," as Lady Mildred remarked, "like the sun in a sea of crimson and gold."

So the autumn came, finding things very quiet at Grassmere, the Chichesters going on in their quiet way, the Rector in his desolate, solitary one—for save a glimpse of his stalwart figure in the woods, the dashing of his dog after a rabbit, or the report of his deadly gun in the copse, none, with the exception of the deaf-and-dumb housekeeper, had any communication with him; and then my Lord and Lady Crownbrilliant returned to England and to the Retreat, which had been in course of the most elaborate preparation for their reception.

Two days after their arrival Mr. Chudleigh Chichester alighted at the Annsleigh railway station, on his birthday visit to the Hall, and the first thing that met his eye as he stepped into the road was Lord Crownbrilliant's carriage, from which his lordship rushed out to

seize him by the hand, looking more the exquisite than ever—his hair parted down the middle and lying flat upon his narrow forehead, and the inevitable eye-glass stuck in his right eye.

"Ah, Mr. Chichester, I'm delighted. Bai Jove, how stwange! how vewy wum I should wun against you the v-v-vewy minute you awive. Going to the Hall? Sir F-F-Fielding quite well—saw him this morning—so's Miss Chichester. Wum thing, telling you how your own f-f-father and sister are! he! he! And how's P-P-Parliament getting on?—I h-hate politics. S-S-Stoopid things, I think—so vewy widiculous. I n-n-never go into the H-House unless I can help it."

Chudleigh smiled, and thought his lordship's absence no very great loss to the House of Lords; but instead of saying so asked after Lady Crownbrilliant.

"C-Carlotta" (how the other man winced as he heard the loved name lisped by the only

person who had any right to use it)—“C-Carlotta is vewy well, j-j-jolly. You must come and see us diwectly you can. Come to-mowwow and s-stay!”

Little did he think, as Chudleigh murmured the few conventional words of acceptation, that with his own hands he was dragging down the thunder-cloud that hung over his head!





CHAPTER XIV.

" True love can never die, and though it sleep
"Twill wake again."

MAUD'S face regained a little of its colour at sight of her brother, and Sir Fielding something of his light spirits.

They both noticed that Chudleigh looked unwell—pale and worn; but he explained the haggardness by assuring them that it was the result of his parliamentary toils, and so they, not suspecting the terrible rent in his heart, thought him a hero, and begged him to prolong his holiday beyond the limits originally arranged.

But this could not be, Chudleigh said, for

he was feeling ambitious—the success of his maiden speech in the House had made him that, and he was anxious to do all he could to aid his party, then in a critical position.

The dinner was a most enjoyable one in the old oak banquet-room, Chudleigh having most of the talking, and the rest being only too delighted to listen; and when they parted for the night there was enough of serene happiness on Chudleigh's face to warrant Maud in comforting herself with the assurance that he, at least, had forgotten his ill-starred love. It never occurred to her to think that the flush of serenity might be occasioned by his nearness to Carlotta, and to the joy of expectancy; indeed, he had omitted all mention of the Retreat, and had not even told them that he had promised to call there the following day.

The morrow being one of those autumn days that outshine the summer, Chudleigh determined to ride his old bay mare over

to the Retreat, and started at twelve o'clock with a fast-beating heart, and a flush that would have belied his sister's anxiety for his health.

He was pale enough, however, as he dismounted, and, going into the drawing-room, waited the arrival of its mistress—and paler still when the door opened, and, dressed in a simple morning costume, which set her figure off to perfection, Carlotta—Lady Crownbrilliant—entered.

She came forward with an easy smile—though Chudleigh, who knew every expression of the beautiful face, read the quiver of the upper lip aright—and said :

“This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Chichester. When did you arrive?”

“Yesterday,” said Chudleigh, dropping her hand and sinking into a chair. “Did not Lord Crownbrilliant tell you that we met at the station?”

“No,” she said, with a slight flush, adding

quickly, as if to avoid all further mention of her husband's name :

"Have you been well? You do not look so well as when I last saw you."

It was his turn to colour now, and he flushed hotly as he remembered her standing at the gate and his last vain appeal.

"I am very well," he said, carelessly. "We have had rather a hard season—exceptionally hard."

"I read your speech—I mean the first, for I have read them all—and thought it a grand one. I wish I could have heard it."

"Do you?" he said, eagerly, but cooling again with a sigh. "I am glad you liked it," he added. "You recognised it, no doubt. It was an amplification of some remarks you made on the subject at the Hall."

"I—I—did not remember them," she said, departing slightly from strict truth, for she did, and felt a thrill of delight at his using them.

"They made the success of the thing," he

said, earnestly. "But you have not told me if you have been well."

"I——" she said. "Oh, yes, very well."

"And enjoyed Italy and the whole trip?"

"Yes," she said, with an air of weariness.

Then there came a silence—Chudleigh's heart too full to speak, hers too frightened, for she feared lest by sign or word she should touch the mine of love she saw in his eyes and heard in the tones of his voice.

"This is a pretty place," at last said Chudleigh.

"Yes," she said. "Will you come and see more of it?"

And they walked out into the dining-room and the conservatories, praising and criticising as they had done in the old time that morning he had taken her to see the Cottage.

In the garden they came upon Lord Crownbrilliant, lying stretched upon a seat, a cigar in his mouth, and a large tankard of champagne

within reach. His lordship was rather fond of champagne cup.

After a chat with him Chudleigh returned to the house and took his leave.

"Maud will be here in a minute, I daresay," he said. "I was obliged to come before her, having a long list of influential constituents whom I must not neglect."

She held out her hand.

"Good-bye, then. You will not neglect us ; we are your constituents, remember."

He pressed her hand lightly.

"May I come—often?"

"We shall always be glad to see you," she replied, in a low voice.

Chudleigh's constituents, notwithstanding their influence, were neglected that morning, for he turned his horse's head towards the moor, and spent the remainder of the morning in a break-neck gallop.

From that morning a terrible temptation assailed him.

His visits to the Retreat were constant.

Scarcely a day passed but he might be found sitting beside Lady Crownbrilliants in the drawing-room, at her feet on the velvet lawn, or facing her in the little outrigger on the river. It is true not a word had passed between them that might not have been said in Lord Crownbrilliants's hearing; but still—well, eyes are eloquent, and a touch of a passionate hand says more than a thousand love sentences.

Carlotta, fully aware of her danger as she was, and having a clear view of the precipice and a knowledge of the fearful abyss that lay beneath, yet could not resist the delight of his presence, the touch of his hand, the passionate yet mournful ring of his earnest voice.

And Lord Crownbrilliants—well, he was either an idiot or blind. A little of both, perhaps; but if he had any uneasy sensation his self-love and conceit set them half way

at rest, and frequent applications to the wine-bottle laid them entirely.

For Lord Crownbrilliant was growing fond of the half-hour after dinner, and the libations that occupied it. He drank frequently and liberally, and although Carlotta had not yet seen him quite intoxicated, she had noticed, with a vivid horror, that he was frequently excited and strange-mannered when entering the drawing-room after dinner, or returning from a race-meeting or a steeplechase.

So the autumn grew late and the trees bare; Chudleigh still in Grassmere, or rather at Annisleigh, lying at Carlotta's feet or pulling her down the river in the little boat; Maud still growing paler and thinner; and Maurice Durant still mysteriously buried in the solitude of the Rectory and the woods.

In October Sir Fielding declared his intention of starting for town, and Chudleigh was despatched to take a house in Grosvenor Square.

Lord Crownbrilliants, somewhat tired of the country, and longing vaguely for the delight of town life, at once decided to take flight too, so that by the middle of October both families were in town—Lord Crownbrilliants in Park Lane, and Sir Fielding Chichester in Grosvenor Square, within easy walking distance of each other.

END OF VOL. II.



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